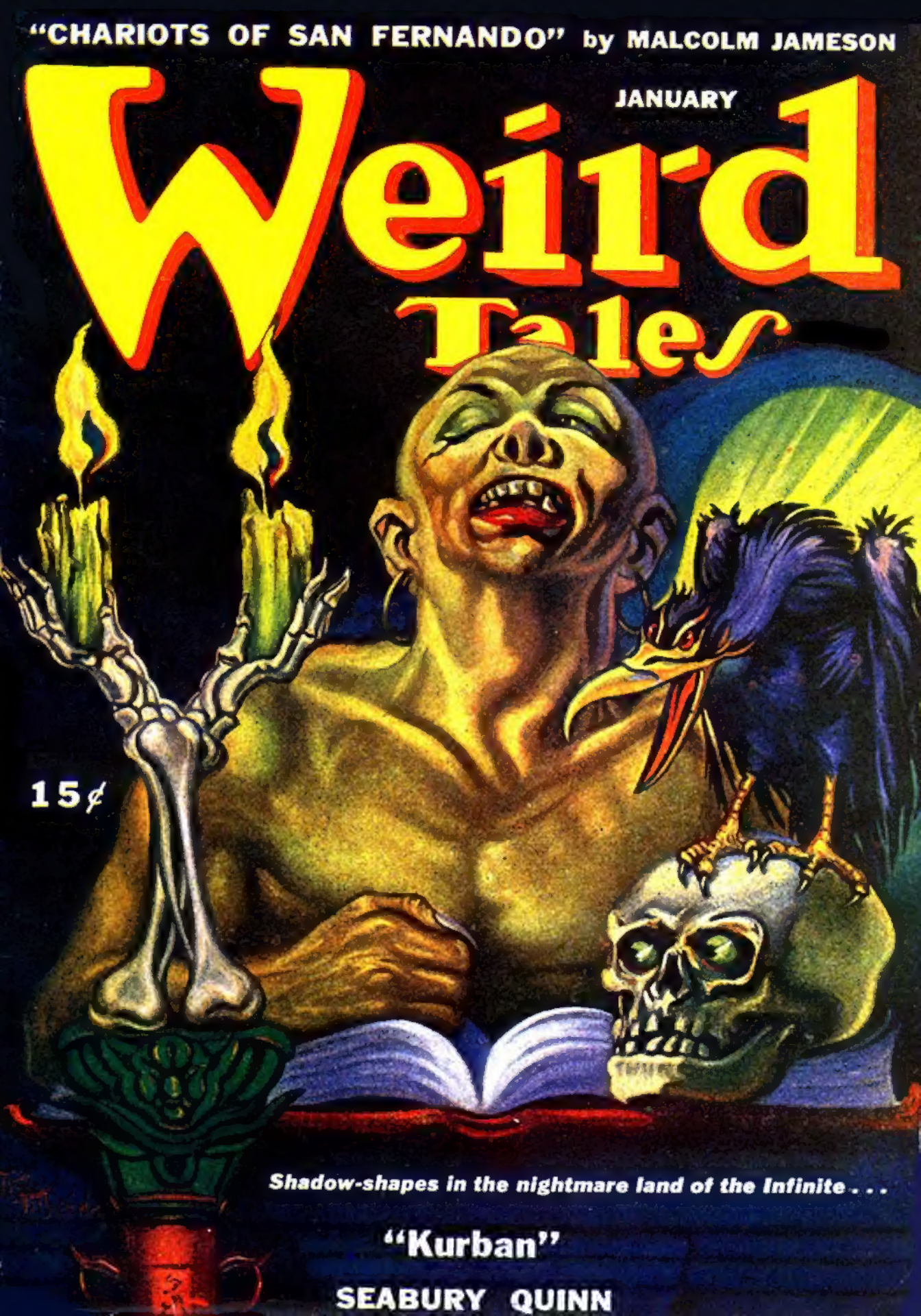
"CHARIOTS OF SAN FERNANDO" by MALCOLM JAMESON

JANUARY

Weird Tales



15¢

Shadow-shapes in the nightmare land of the Infinite . . .

"Kurban"

SEABURY QUINN

It's annoying when folks just drop in... *but*

infectious dandruff

is more annoying still!

Get after it with LISTERINE at the first sign of trouble

What makes the infectious type of dandruff so annoying, so distressing, are those troublesome flakes on collar or dress . . . and the scalp irritation and itching . . . that so often accompany the condition.

If you're troubled in this way, look out—you may have this common form of dandruff, so act now before it gets worse.

Has Helped Thousands

Start right in with Listerine Antiseptic and massage. This is the medical treatment that has shown such amazing results in a substantial majority of clinical test cases . . . the treatment that has also helped thousands of other people.

You, too, may find it as helpful as it is delightful. Listerine is so easy, so simple to use, and so stimulating! You simply douse it on the scalp morning and night and follow with vigorous and persistent massage.

Thousands of users have marvelled at how flakes and scales begin to disappear, how much cleaner and healthier their scalps appear. And remember:

Kills "Bottle Bacillus"

Listerine kills millions of germs on scalp and hair, including Pityrosporum Ovale, the strange "Bottle Bacillus" recognized by outstanding dandruff specialists as a causative agent of infectious dandruff.

This germ-killing action, we believe, helps to explain why, in a clinical test, 76% of dandruff sufferers showed either complete disappearance of or marked improvement in the symptoms of dandruff within a month. Lambert Pharmacal Co., *St. Louis, Missouri.*

The Treatment

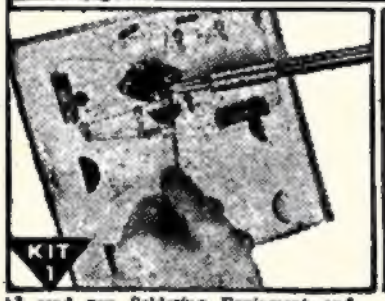
MEN: Douse full strength Listerine Antiseptic on the scalp morning and night. **WOMEN:** Part the hair at various places, and apply Listerine Antiseptic right along the part with a medicine dropper, to avoid wetting the hair excessively.

Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage with fingers or a good hairbrush. Continue the treatment so long as dandruff is in evidence. And even though you're free from dandruff, enjoy a Listerine Antiseptic massage once a week to guard against infection. Listerine is the same antiseptic that has been famous for more than 50 years as a mouth wash and gargle.

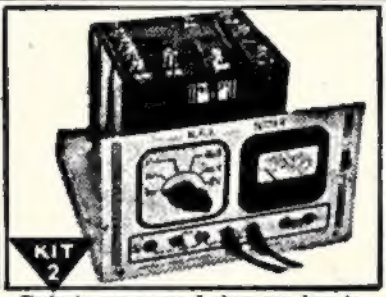
LISTERINE — the delightful treatment

I Will Show You How to Learn RADIO by Practicing in Spare Time

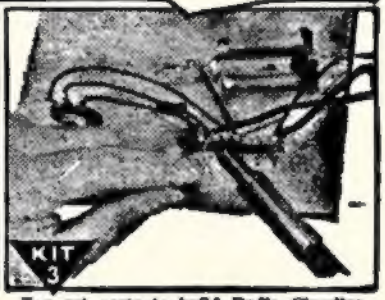
I Send You Big Kits of Radio Parts



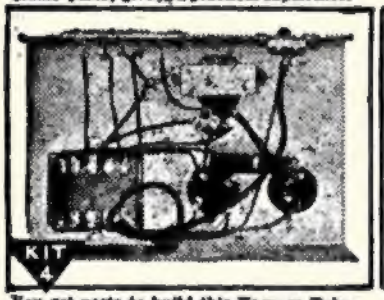
I send you Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts; show you how to do Radio soldering; how to mount and connect Radio parts; give you practical experience.



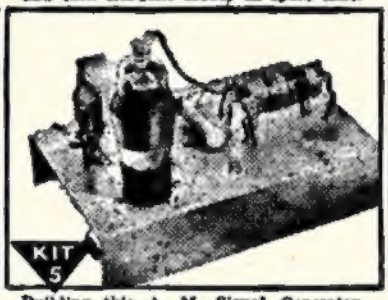
Early in my course I show you how to build this N.R.I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



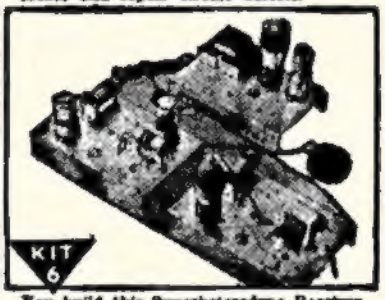
You get parts to build Radio Circuits; then test them; see how they work; learn how to design special circuits; how to locate and repair circuit defects.



You get parts to build this Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with packs of many kinds; learn to correct power pack troubles.



Building this A. M. Signal Generator gives you more valuable experience. It provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments.



You build this Superheterodyne Receiver which brings in local and distant stations—and gives you more experience to help you win success in Radio.

KNOW RADIO—*Win Success*

I Will Train You at Home—SAMPLE LESSON FREE

APPROVED for training under G.I. BILL

Do you want a good-pay job in the fast-growing Radio Industry—or your own Radio Shop? Mail the Coupon for a Sample Lesson and my 64-page book, "How to Be a Success in RADIO—Television, Electronics," both FREE. See how I will train you at home—how you get practical Radio experience, building, testing Radio circuits with BIG KITS OF PARTS I send!

Many Beginners Soon Make Extra Money In Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS that show how to make EXTRA money fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time while still learning! It's probably easier to get started now than ever before, because the Radio Repair Business is booming. Trained Radio Technicians also find profitable opportunities in Police, Aviation, Marine Radio, Broadcasting, Radio Manufacturing, Public Address work. Think of even greater opportunities as Television, FM, and Electronic devices become available to the public! Send for FREE books now!

Find Out What NRI Can Do for You

Mail Coupon for Sample Lesson and my FREE 64-page book. Read the details about my Course; letters from men I trained; see how quickly, easily you can get started. No obligation! Just MAIL COUPON NOW in envelope or paste on penny postal. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 7DM, National Radio Institute, Pioneer Home Study Radio School, Washington 9, D. C.

My Course Includes Training in
TELEVISION · ELECTRONICS
FREQUENCY MODULATION

Approved for Training under GI Bill

Good for Both—FREE

Mr. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 7DM
National Radio Institute
Washington 9, D. C.

Mail me FREE, your sample lesson and 64-page book. (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name..... Age.....

Address.....

City..... Zone..... State.....

ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

JANUARY, 1946 Cover by A. R. Tilburne

NOVELETTES

KURBAN . . . . . Seabury Quinn 8
Like Pharoah's necromancers, he could cast his rod upon the earth and it became a live, hissing serpent

CHARIOTS OF SAN FERNANDO . . . . . Malcolm Jameson 24
There are many unsolved mysteries in this strange world of ours—like the bizarre adventures at the Amazon's headwaters!

SHORT STORIES

SIN'S DOORWAY . . . . . Manly Wade Wellman 38
A soul is free to enter heaven if its burden of sin is borne by a living person

SEED . . . . . Jack Snow 48
How thin is the veneer of modern learning. And how little it takes to shake one's faith!

MR. BAUER AND THE ATOMS . . . . . Fritz Leiber 58
If a person suddenly became radio active, with all that atomic energy inside his body. . .

SATAN'S PHONOGRAPH . . . . . Robert Bloch 62
Have you ever heard of a recording machine so dammably delicate that it captures the human soul?

PIKEMAN . . . . . August Derleth 66
The tombstone warned "Prepare for death and follow me!"

THE DIVERSIONS OF MME. GAMORRA . . . . . Harold Lawlor 72
What, pray, would people be like if they were reduced to their least common denominator!

ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD . . . . . Charles King 82
The mass of bloated flesh that could be formed into different shapes by kneading with the fingers—was me!

VERSE

RECAPTURE H. P. Lovecraft 37

SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS Irwin J. Weill 57

THE EYRIE AND THE WEIRD TALES CLUB 92

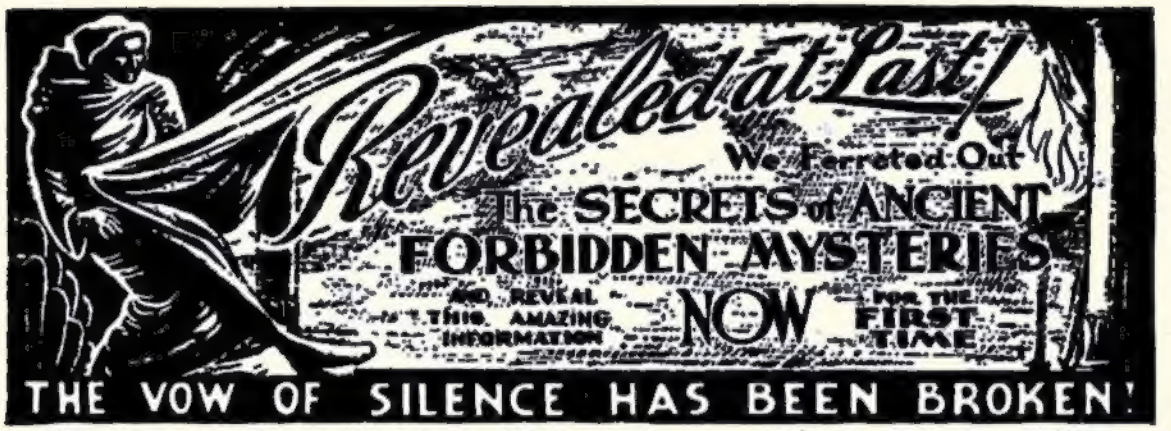
Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 15 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, 90¢. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand London, W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. Copyright, 1945, by Weird Tales. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

172

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A. Vol. 39, No. 3

J. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*



"The 7 Keys to Power alleges to teach," the author says, "All the Mysteries of Life from the Cradle to the Grave—and Beyond. It tells you the particular day and hour to do anything you desire, whether it be in the light of the moon, sun, or in total darkness."

He claims, "The power to get what you want revealed at last, for the first time since the dawn of creation. The very same power which the ancient Chaldeans, Cuthic, Priests, Egyptians, Babylonians, and Sumarians used is at our disposal today."

He says, "Follow the simple directions, and you can do anything you desire. No one can tell how these Master Forces are used without knowing about this book, but with it you can mold anyone to your will."

From this book, He says, "You can learn the arts of an old Science as practiced by the Ancient Priestly Orders. Their marvels were almost beyond belief. You, too, can learn to do them all with the instructions written in this Book." Lewis de Claremont claims, "It would be a shame if these things could all be yours and you failed to grasp them."

He claims, "It is every man's birthright to have these things of life: MONEY! GOOD HEALTH! HAPPINESS! If you lack any of these, then this book has an important message for you. No matter what you need, there exists a spiritual power which is abundantly able to bring you whatever things you need."

OVERCOME ALL ENEMIES, OBSTACLES & HIDDEN FEARS

ARE YOU CROSSED IN ANY WAY?

The Seven Keys to Power, Lewis de Claremont says, shows you how to remove and cast it back.

The Book Purports to Tell You How to—

- Gain the love of the opposite sex.
- Unite people for marriages.
- Obtain property.
- Make people do your bidding.
- Make any person love you.
- Make people bring back stolen goods.
- Make anyone lucky in any games.
- Cure any kind of sickness without medicine.
- Get any job you want.
- Cast a spell on anyone, no matter where they are.
- Get people out of law suits, courts, or prison.
- Banish all misery.
- Gain the mastery of all things.
- Regain your youth and vigor.
- Choose words according to ancient, holy methods.

THE ONLY TRUE BOOK OF SUPREME MASTERSHIP!

This is the Power, He says, from which the old masters gained their knowledge and from which they sold limitless portions to certain favored Kings, Priests, and others at high prices, but never to be revealed under a vow, the violation of which entailed severe punishment.

THE VOW HAS NOW BEEN BROKEN

This book, he claims, shows you the secrets of old which when properly applied makes you able to control the will of all without their knowing it. If you have a problem and you wish to solve it, he says, don't hesitate. Advertisements cannot describe nor do this wonderful book justice. You must read it and digest its meaning, to really appreciate its worth.

GUARANTEED TO SATISFY OR YOUR MONEY REFUNDED

Only a limited number available for sale, so don't wait. It is worth many times its price. If you are wise, you will rush your order for this book NOW.

$1.

MR. LUCK'S CURIO CO., Dept. 709,
207 N. Michigan Avenue,
Chicago 1, Illinois.

This coupon is worth $1.00 to you. Attach a Money Order for $1 to this coupon and we will send you your copy of The Seven Keys to Power—Regularly $2 for only $1.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

SEND NO MONEY!
If you wish we Trust You. . . . Pay Postman $1 on delivery plus a few pennies Postage. Check here ( ).

The Magic of Mind

WERE the great personages of the past victims of a stupendous hoax? Could such eminent men of the ancient world as Socrates, Pericles, and Alexander the Great have been deluded and cast under the spell of witchcraft—or did the oracles whom they consulted actually possess *a mysterious faculty of foresight?* That *the human mind can truly exert an influence over things and conditions* was not a credulous belief of the ancients, but a known and demonstrable fact to them. That there exists a wealth of infinite knowledge just beyond the border of our daily thoughts, which can be aroused and commanded at will, was not a fantasy of these sages of antiquity, but a dependable aid to which they turned in time of need.

It is time you realized that the rites, rituals and practices of the ancients were not superstitions, but subterfuges to conceal the marvelous workings of natural law from those who would have misused them. Telepathy, projection of thought, the materializing of ideas into helpful realities, are no longer thought by intelligent persons to be impossible practices, but instead, *demonstrable sciences,* by which a greater life of happiness may be had.

One of America's foremost psychologists and university instructors, says of his experiments with thought transference and the powers of mind—"The successes were much too numerous to be merely lucky hits and one can see no way for guessing to have accounted for the results." *Have you* that open-minded attitude of today which warrants a clear, positive revelation of the facts of mind which intolerance and bigotry have suppressed for years? *Advance with the times;* learn the truth about your inherited powers.

Let this free book explain

The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) have been leaders in introducing the ancient wisdom of mental phenomena. Established throughout the world for centuries, they have for ages expounded these truths to those thinking men and women who sought to make the utmost of their natural faculties. Use the coupon below—avail yourself of a pleasing book of interesting information which explains how you may acquire this most *unusual* and *helpful knowledge.*

The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)

USE THIS COUPON

Scribe M.C.Z.
The Rosicrucians, AMORC,
San Jose, California.
I am sincerely interested in knowing more about this unseen, vital power which can be used in acquiring the fullness and happiness of life. Please send me, without cost, the book, "THE MASTERY OF LIFE," which tells me how to receive this information.

Name _____

Address _____ State _____

THE MODERN A-B-C DeFOREST WAY!

Learn RADIO ELECTRONICS quicker · easier AT HOME

The famous Dr. Lee DeForest supervised the preparation of DeForest's Training

You GET A LOOSE-LEAF LESSONS

DeFOREST'S TRAINING includes 90 loose-leaf lessons, prepared under the supervision of one of the world's foremost Radio authorities, Dr. Lee DeForest—inventor of the audion tube which has helped make modern radio possible... holder of over 300 radio patents ... and often called "Father of Radio."

FOR A BETTER OPPORTUNITY TODAY— PLUS A BETTER POST-WAR FUTURE

Get into Radio and Electronics—a billion dollar OPPORTUNITY FIELD OF TODAY that promises such a THRILLING POST-WAR FUTURE. See how you may get ready for a GOOD JOB ... or a BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN ... BETTER PAY and HIGHER RATING in military service. Read how DeFOREST'S prepares you for your start in Radio-Electronics in your spare-time at home—easier, quicker because it includes BOTH "Learn-by-Seeing" Movies and "Learn-by-Doing" Radio Parts and Assemblies. You'll find all these answers, and more, in DeFOREST'S big, illustrated book, "VICTORY FOR YOU!" It's FREE.

You Get This Exclusive 3-WAY Combination of Radio Training Advantages

You READ ... you SEE ... you DO! (A) You get well-illustrated lessons prepared the modern loose-leaf way to help keep your training up-to-date. (B) You get real, practical RADIO EXPERIENCE from eight big kits of standard Radio parts and assemblies. (C) You get the use of a 16 mm. MOVIE PROJECTOR AND 12 TRAINING FILMS. You S-E-E "hidden actions" of Radio circuits from fascinating, easy-to-learn-from ACTION MOVIES. You get what we think are the major Radio training aids—AT HOME!

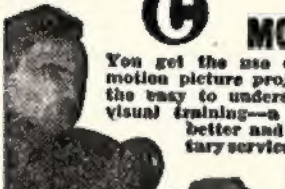
You Get EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

DeFOREST'S Training includes an effective EMPLOYMENT SERVICE that has long-established contacts with many companies employing trained Radio men. You enjoy this valuable assistance once you are trained. DeFOREST'S is affiliated with the DeVRY CORPORATION—well known manufacturer of Motion Picture Sound Equipment.

B You WORK AT HOME WITH PRACTICAL EQUIPMENT

You enjoy a "Home Laboratory." You get valuable Radio experience by building modern Radio circuits that operate; also, "Electric Eye" devices, Light Beam Transmitter, Public Address System, Wireless Microphone, etc. 133 fascinating experiments in all—in spare time, at home.

C You SHOW MOVIES AT HOME



You get the use of a genuine DeVry 16 mm. motion picture projector and films which provide the easy to understand, highly effective modern visual training—a method used today to train better and faster in war plants and military service. Radio principles come to life! ...you see electricity in action, electronics made CLEAR the EASIER DeForest way. Get DeForest's BIG FREE BOOK, "VICTORY FOR YOU"—a key to a good pay job in the electronics industry, to a business of your own or to better military rating and pay. Act now. Mail the coupon today!

SEND FOR FREE BOOK!

DeFOREST'S TRAINING, INC., Chicago, Ill.

DeFOREST'S TRAINING, INC.
2535-41 N. Ashland Ave., Dept. NF-B10
Chicago 14, Illinois, U. S. A.

Please send me—FREE and WITHOUT OBLIGATION—illustrated book, "VICTORY FOR YOU," showing how I can prepare for Radio with your Home Movies and Laboratory Kits.

Name..... Age.....

Address.....

City..... Zone..... State.....

☐ If under 16, check here for special information. ☐ If a veteran of World War II, check here.

GET INTO RADIO TELEVISION ELECTRONICS NOW!

This amazing new shop instruction system gives you actual experience with a Home Radio Laboratory—part of the

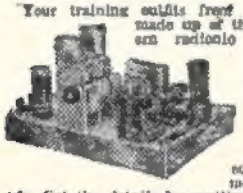
You build this complete modern superheterodyne receiver with the equipment that comes with your National Training at no extra cost.

SHOP METHOD HOME TRAINING

FOR YOU—A REAL HOME LABORATORY IN MODERN RADIO

Your National Training Kits include equipment for hundreds of practical electronic experiments in your own home. You have the genuine parts for this audio oscillator which you get to understand by building it yourself.

You learn modulation, beat frequencies, signal generation by actually building this small radio transmitter with your National shop parts.



Your training outfits from National are made up of the most modern radionic equipment—much of it just out of the experimental laboratory. You learn new ways of handling equipment by modern methods. Get the details by mailing the coupon.

from one of the world's best established Oldest and Largest Technical Trade Schools

Send the coupon below, immediately. Learn how this sensationally improved, practical speed-up training can fit you in a short time, for the GREAT BUSINESS OF RADIO—for the NEW AND RAPIDLY EXPANDING FIELD OF FREQUENCY MODULATION (F.M.), TELEVISION AND ELECTRONICS.

This is the thoroughly proved, quick and easy speed-up method used so extensively in wartime training—endorsed by the success of National men everywhere—a system by which you study in spare time—off hours, even minutes right in your home and yet have the ADVANTAGE OF REAL SHOP EXPERIENCE to back you up.

Trained Radio Men Wanted

The man who really knows modern Radio is in greater demand today than ever before—not only in Radio proper but in Television and Electronics—in Aviation, Transportation, Communications. Good jobs are wide open, WAITING FOR YOU, in the production, operation and maintenance of modern electronic equipment—in radio stations, in hundreds of industries—in homes, theatres and studios. Good, sound training in this important field is absolutely necessary. And now, National Schools brings such training to you no matter where you live or what you may be doing—not only the fundamental theory but the actual experience that comes with knowing shop practice and working with real equipment—demonstrating each step with first-hand knowledge. This is true "learning by doing"—direct from the great shops and laboratories of National Schools where new developments in methods, equipment and applications are constantly going forward.

Only National can offer you such practical training because only National has the plant to back it up. Sample this training yourself. MAIL THE COUPON FOR A FREE LESSON.

POSTWAR SUCCESS and SECURITY FOR YOU

Radio is a Big, Sound, Well-Established Business. Television is just on the threshold of limitless expansion. When you hang up your uniform—when your war job folds up, will you step out proudly into an essential established industry? Perhaps into a business of your own? Answer these questions by reading the catalog sent you FREE from National Schools. Face realities now! Fill out and mail the coupon today.

Check the Job You Now Have With These Opportunities in RADIO

1. **Financial Security** Radio has grown from $100 million to $5 billion in past few years.
2. **Limitless Future** predicted by over 1,800 manufacturers of equipment.
3. **Television promises** over half a million jobs alone—experts estimate.
4. **Electronics** opens wide new fields in home and industrial use.
5. **Your Own Business** with little or no capital.

Get the details. Use the Coupon!

National Training Wins Big Jobs

You, too can share the success of National graduates. Joseph Grumich, Lake Hiawatha, N. J., writes: "My latest offer, was for $5,800.00 as Radio Photo Engineer, but I am doing well where I am. I am deeply indebted to National."

While still a student of National training, L. Wilson, of Vallejo, California, writes: "My pay has jumped from $52.18 a week to $72.05, and the end is not in sight. I am proud of my National Course."

Joseph Michel, Jr., Granite City, Illinois, writes: "I am enthused with National training. I am now earning $225 a month as a radio operator and technician and $30 a week more in my shop at home."

NATIONAL SCHOOLS
LOS ANGELES 37, CALIFORNIA

MAIL OPPORTUNITY COUPON FOR QUICK ACTION

(Mail in envelope or paste on penny post card)

National Schools, Dept. 10-NS
4000 South Figueroa Street
Los Angeles 37, California

Mail me FREE the books mentioned in your ad including a sample lesson of your course. I understand no salesman will call on me.

NAME.....AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

Include your zone number

I'LL SHOW YOU HOW TO SUCCEED IN RADIO

Here's the right training for Big Post-War Pay!

A RADIO SERVICE BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN

A GOOD JOB IN RADIO & TELEVISION BROADCASTING

RADIO-ELECTRONIC SERVICE ENGINEER

J. L. Sprayberry, one of the country's foremost Radio Teachers.

BE A RADIO ELECTRONICIAN

Now! You Can Prepare at Home in Spare Time for Amazing Opportunities Ahead in RADIO—ELECTRONICS—TELEVISION

The offer I make you here is the opportunity of a lifetime. It's your big chance to get ready for a wonderful future in the swiftly expanding field of Radio-Electronics INCLUDING Radio, Television, Frequency Modulation and Industrial Electronics. Be wise! NOW'S the time to start. Opportunities ahead are tremendous. No previous experience is necessary. The Sprayberry Course starts right at the beginning of Radio. You can't get lost. It gets the various subjects across in such a clear, simple way that you understand and remember. And, you can master my entire course in your spare time. It will not interfere in any way with your present duties. Along with your Training, you will receive my famous BUSINESS BUILDERS which will show you how to make some nice profits while learning.

Prepares You for a Business of Your Own or Good Radio Job

My training will give you the broad, fundamental principles so necessary as a background, no matter which branch of Radio you wish to specialize in. I make it easy for you to learn Radio Set Repair and Installation work. I teach you how to install and repair Electronic Equipment. In fact, you'll be a fully qualified RADIO-ELECTRONICIAN, equipped with the skill and knowledge to perform efficiently and to make a wonderful success of yourself.

Sprayberry Training Gives You Both TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE—SKILLED HANDS

There's only one *right* way to learn Radio Electronics. You must get it through simplified lesson study combined with actual "shop" practice under the personal guidance of a qualified Radio Teacher. It's exactly this way that Sprayberry trains you . . . supplying real Radio parts for learn-by-doing experience right at home. Thus, you learn faster, your understanding is clear-cut, you acquire the practical "know-how" essential to a good-paying Radio job or a Radio business of your own.

I'll Show You a New, Fast Way to Test Radio Sets Without Mfg. Equipment

The very same Radio Parts I supply with your Course for gaining pre-experience in Radio Repair work may be adapted through an exclusive Sprayberry wiring procedure to serve for complete, fast, accurate Radio Receiver trouble-shooting. Thus, under Sprayberry methods, you do not have one cent of outlay for manufactured Test Equipment which is not only expensive but scarce.

Read What Graduate Says "One Job Nets About $28.00"

"Since last week I fixed 7 radios, all good-paying jobs, and right now I am working on an amplifier system. This job alone will net me about $26.00. As long as my work keeps coming in this way, I have only one word to say and that is, "Thanks to my Sprayberry training" and I am not afraid to boast about it." — ADRIEN BENJAMIN, North Grosvenordale, Conn.

DON'T PUT IT OFF!

Get the facts about my training—now! Take the first important step toward the money-making future of your dreams. All features are fully explained in my big, illustrated FREE Catalog which comes to you along with another valuable FREE book you'll be glad to own. Mail coupon AT ONCE!

JUST OUT! FREE! "How to Read Radio Diagrams and Symbols"

. . . a valuable new book which explains in simple English how to read and understand any Radio Set Diagram or circuit. Includes translations of all Radio symbols. Send for this FREE book now, and along with it I will send you another big FREE book describing my Radio-Electronic training.

GET FREE BOOKS

Sprayberry Academy of Radio
F. L. Sprayberry, President, Room 68105 Pueblo, Colorado

Please rush my FREE copies of "How to MAKE MONEY in RADIO, ELECTRONICS and TELEVISION," and "How to READ RADIO DIAGRAMS and SYMBOLS."

Name ..... Age.....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

(Mail in plain envelope or paste on penny postcard)

Kurban

THE clock on my desk registered 6:45, the patient had been dismissed, from the house came appetizing odors and the rattle of a cocktail shaker briskly agitated. Dinner would be ready in a few minutes and— The chiming of the office bell came like a warning of impending disappointment as the late caller obeyed the "Ring and Enter" engraved on the brass plate decorating the door. Devoutly I hoped that the *pièce de resistance* would not be steak. A roast is little the worse for an extra half hour in a low oven, but a steak. . . .

"Trowbridge!" Dunscomb Doniphan strode into the consulting room. "Thank goodness I caught you in. I'm almost frantic, old man."

"Sit down," I invited, noting the deep grooves etched by worry wrinkles in his brow, the long lines like parentheses that scored his cheeks, and the tired look in his eyes. Here was fatigue as plainly to be read as sky-writing on a still day, another case of the "nervous prosperity" that had swept the country like a plague as war orders piled up and price became a matter of decreasing importance. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"Austine!" he flung the name at me as if it were a missile.

"Austine?" I echoed. "What—"

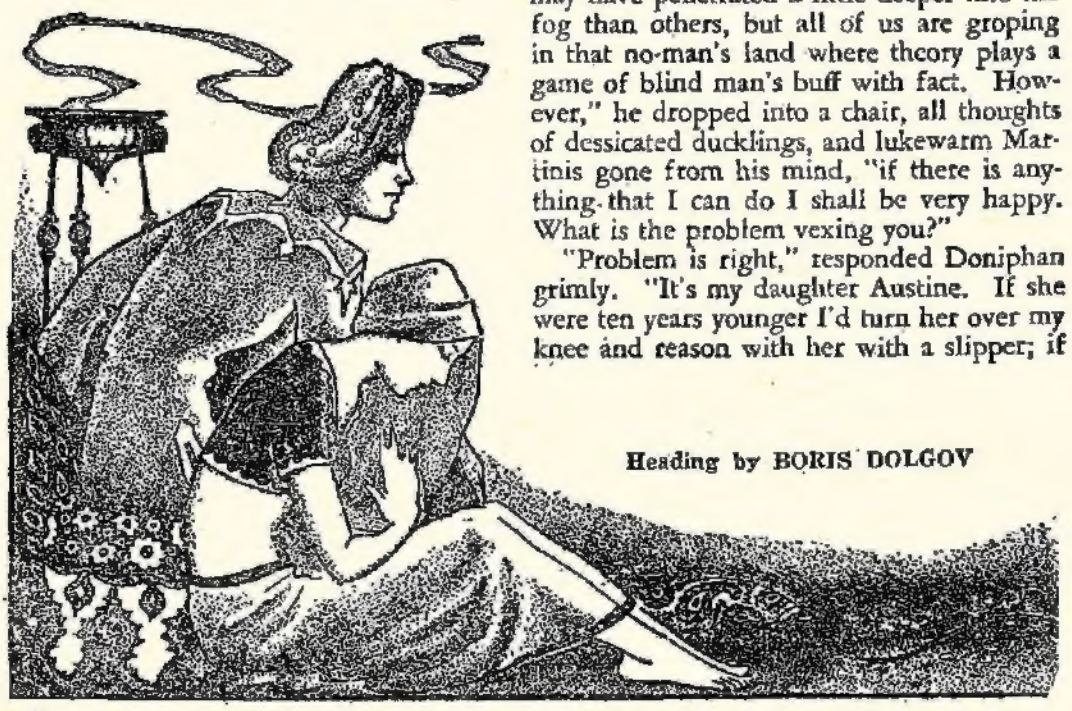
"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, the ducklings roasting for our dinner are utterly *incinéree*, and the Martinis I have made with loving care—ah!" as he noticed Doniphan the little Frenchman paused abashed, "a thousand pardons, *Monsieur*, I did not know that Dr. Trowbridge entertained a patient—"

"This is Dr. de Grandin, Doniphan," I introduced. "Dr. de Grandin, Dunscomb Doniphan. We were in college together." The small Frenchman shook hands cordially and turned to leave, but:

"I've heard of you, Dr. de Grandin," Doniphan interposed. "I understand you're an expert in psychiatry."

"There are no experts in psychiatry," de Grandin denied with a smile. "Some of us may have penetrated a little deeper into the fog than others, but all of us are groping in that no-man's land where theory plays a game of blind man's buff with fact. However," he dropped into a chair, all thoughts of dessicated ducklings, and lukewarm Martinis gone from his mind, "if there is anything that I can do I shall be very happy. What is the problem vexing you?"

"Problem is right," responded Doniphan grimly. "It's my daughter Austine. If she were ten years younger I'd turn her over my knee and reason with her with a slipper; if



Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

The Swami made powerful magic . . . the magic that controls human lives.

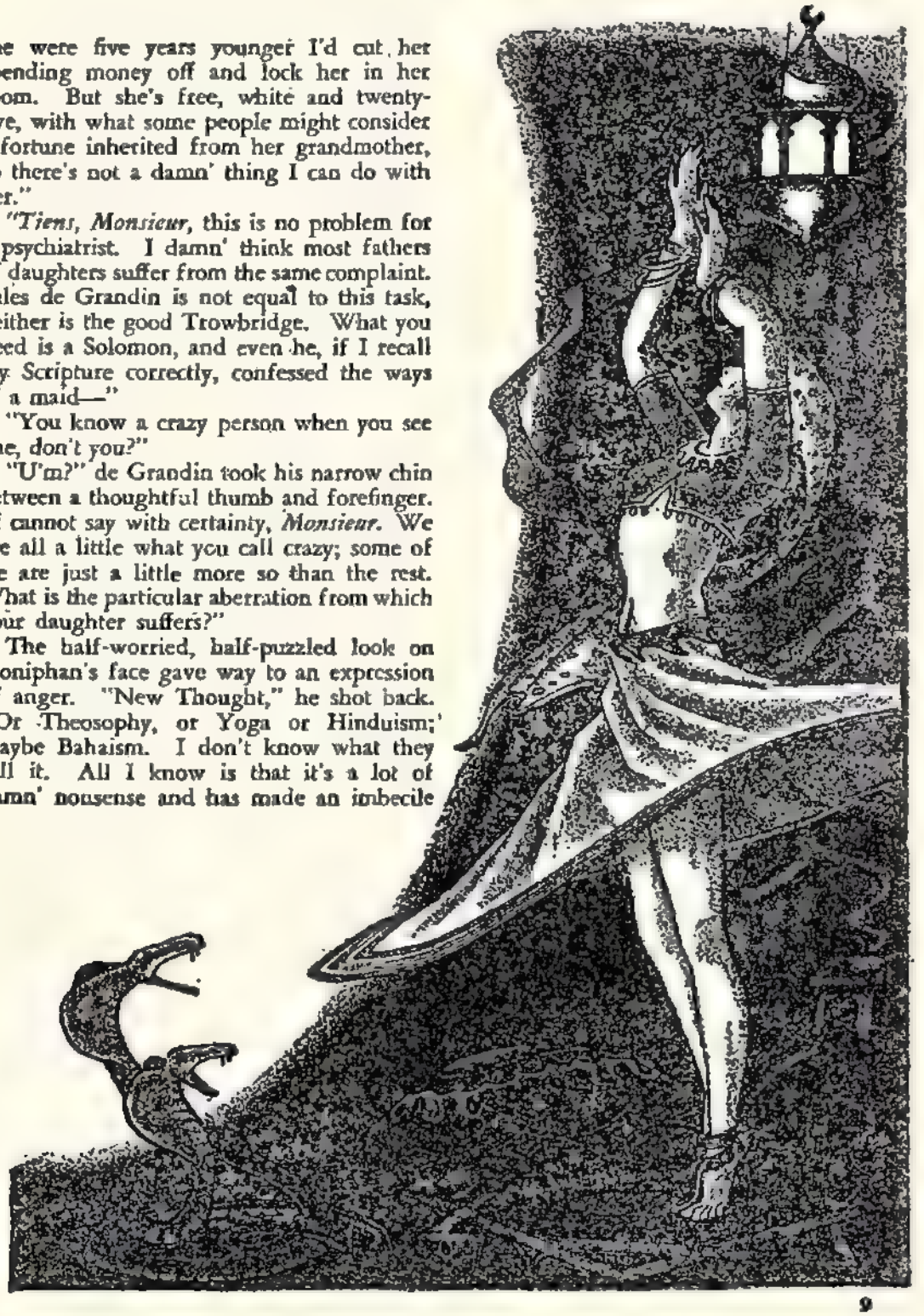
she were five years younger I'd cut her spending money off and lock her in her room. But she's free, white and twenty-five, with what some people might consider a fortune inherited from her grandmother, so there's not a damn' thing I can do with her."

"*Tiens, Monsieur,* this is no problem for a psychiatrist. I damn' think most fathers of daughters suffer from the same complaint. Jules de Grandin is not equal to this task, neither is the good Trowbridge. What you need is a Solomon, and even he, if I recall my Scripture correctly, confessed the ways of a maid—"

"You know a crazy person when you see one, don't you?"

"U'm?" de Grandin took his narrow chin between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. "I cannot say with certainty, *Monsieur.* We are all a little what you call crazy; some of we are just a little more so than the rest. What is the particular aberration from which your daughter suffers?"

The half-worried, half-puzzled look on Doniphan's face gave way to an expression of anger. "New Thought," he shot back. "Or Theosophy, or Yoga or Hinduism; maybe Bahaism. I don't know what they call it. All I know is that it's a lot of damn' nonsense and has made an imbecile



of what was once a fairly intelligent young woman." The smoldering anger in his eyes gave way to blazing rage. "Listen, you two:

"Ten months ago this Swami Ramapali came to brighten our ignorance with the light of his countenance. Where he came from, only God knows. He might have come from India or Indiana, but wherever he hails from, he's got what the women, young and old, eat up. Started out by giving little talks at afternoon gatherings, driveling about being In Tune With the Infinite and the Nothingness of Matter, and all that sort of rot. First thing we knew he'd progressed to holding regular meetings, then to forming a congregation with a temple of its own; three months ago he bought the Judson farm out by Passaic and founded a colony. Good Lord!" he snorted in disgust.

"And this colony of which you speak, *Monsieur*. It is—"

"I don't know what it is. Nobody does. Austine had been going to this faker's meetings regularly, and contributing plenty to them, judging by the entries we found in her check books since she left home. When he set up housekeeping at the Judson place she was one of the first to join him. I haven't laid eyes on her since. Neither has her mother. We've been out there half a dozen times, but she won't see us. Sends out word she's in her Silence, or some such damnfool message."

DE GRANDIN'S slender brows went up the fraction of an inch. "You suspect it to be a place where—how do you say him?—untrammeled love is practiced?"

"I don't know what to think or suspect. I don't know anything about it, neither does anyone else. As nearly as we can find out, there are some thirty or forty people living there, mostly young women, though there's a sprinkling of old spinsters and a few widows. All of 'em are wealthy and all of 'em have cut themselves off from their families as completely as Austine has broken with us. I've been to the police. They can't, or won't, do anything. Say there's no crime charged, and all that sort of legalistic rot. Now, what I want you to do is"—he leveled a stiff forefinger at de Grandin and me in turn—"find some way of getting into that booby-hatch, sizing up the situation, and then, if you can find a shred of evidence, appear before a lunacy commission and have Austine committed. I really think she's clear off her rocker over this business, but if we can get her out and away from the Swami's influence she'll come out of it. Then—it ought to be as easy to have her declared sane as it was to have her adjudged incompetent, oughtn't it?"

"It is deplorable," de Grandin murmured.

"Ain't it," Doniphan agreed inelegantly. "To think that a well-brought-up young woman—"

"Should have such a bigoted, narrow-minded parent, *parbleu!*" interrupted the small Frenchman fiercely. "This cult to which Mademoiselle your daughter has attached herself may be all that you suspect, and more, but at any rate it satisfies her. She finds it to her liking. And you, *Monsieur*, because it does not meet with your approval, would perpetrate this dreadful thing, have your own daughter branded *alienée*—a mad women—to be forever suspected of insanity, to have her children suspect of a strain of madness in their blood. *Pardieu*, it is entirely too much, this! Me, I will have none of it. Good day, *Monsieur!*" He rose, bowed coldly, and left the room.

"Well, Trowbridge, that's that," Doniphan murmured. "What do you say?"

"I say go slow," I temporized. "Austine may have gone off the deep end, but she'll come round in time. Just wait and see what happens."

"That your last word?"

"I'm afraid so. I couldn't lend myself to any such scheme as you propose—"

"All right. You're not the only doctor in town. I'll find one who'll be willing to listen to reason for a thousand-dollar fee."

"BY THE way, de Grandin," I remarked casually at dinner some nights later, "that Swami that Doniphan was so burned up about is making a talk at Mrs. Tenbroeck's this evening. Would you care to have a look at him? I must confess I'm somewhat curious after all I've heard."

He looked up from his apple tart with one of his direct cat-stares. "I think I should, my friend. He may be a *jongleur*,

quite possibly a criminal, but I should like to see this fellow who has, as Monsieur Doniphan expressed it, what the ladies devour. Yes, by all means, let us go."

THE Swami Ramapali was just finishing his discourse as de Grandin and I found seats in the Tenbroeck drawing room. He was a young man slightly under middle height, dark-complected, but obviously not a member of the colored races. Dark hair, lustrous and inclined to curl, was smoothly parted in the middle and hung in long ringlets each side of his face, brushing the velvet collar of his dinner coat. His shirt of fine white linen was decorated with a double row of box pleats edged with fine lace, and against its immaculate whiteness there showed studs of onyx set with small star sapphires. Knotted negligently beneath his wide collar was a flowing black silk tie of the sort affected by art students of the '90's. His eyes were very large, prune-black, and held a drowsy, sensuous expression.

"All, all is only seeming," he concluded in a voice that was almost a purr. "All seeming is a fantasy, a nothingness, a part of Brahm's dream. We are but shadow-shapes in the Dream of the Infinite; what we call matter is delusion. Thought only is eternal, and that which we call thought is but the echo of an echo in the Dream of the Creator."

"*Grand dieu des porcs,* he talks the double-talk, this one!" de Grandin whispered. "What is this maundering of the nothingness of something and echoes of echoes—"

"*S-s-st!*" I hissed him into silence, for the Swami had stepped forward from his place beside the grand piano and the lights which had been lowered while he spoke were turned on. The vaguely unfavorable impression the Swami had made on me when I first saw him was heightened by the full light of the chandelier. As our hostess presented us and his somber, brooding eyes fell on me with a look of almost calculating appraisal, I had a momentary feeling of revulsion as unreasonable and inexplicable, but as tangible, as a warm-blooded creature's instinctive reaction to a snake.

He spoke no word of recognition as de Grandin and I bowed. Serene, statue-still, he received our murmured expressions of pleasure at the meeting with an air of aloofness that was almost contemptuous. Only for a fleeting instant did his expression change. Something, perhaps the gleam of mockery in the little Frenchman's gaze, hardened his large eyes for an instant, and I had a feeling that it would behoove my friend not to turn his back on the Swami if a dagger were handy.

In the dining room the long sideboard was laden with silver dishes of nuts, dried figs, dates and raisins. De Grandin sampled the contents of the first compote and turned away with a wry face. "Name of a name," he swore softly, "such vileness should be prohibited by law!"

"Isn't it simply wonderful?" a lady with more than ample bosom and a succession of assistant chins gushed in my ear. "It's in honor of the Swami, you know. His religion forbids eating anything that has been cooked or killed. Only the kind fruits of the kind earth are spread for a repast when he is present. I'm thinking seriously of taking up the diet. Poor dear Estrella Santho took it up, you know, and it did wonders—simply wonders—for her."

De Grandin fixed his set, unwinking catstare on her. "And this poor dear lady, where is she now, if you please?"

Our *vis-à-vis* seemed slightly taken aback, but rallied in a moment with a sad sweet smile. "She has passed on—her faith was stronger than ours. Where we linger hesitating on the brink, afraid to take the plunge, she made the great decision and became a neophyte in the Swami's colony, the Gateway to Peace. She had completed the initial steps and was almost ready to become one of the *hieroi* when she was absorbed into the Infinite, she has passed her final incarnation and dwells forever in the ineffable light emanated by the Divine All—"

"In fine, *Madame,* one gathers she is defunct, deceased; dead?"

"In the language of the untaught—yes," the lady admitted. "It was so tragic, too. You see, the dwellers on the Threshold of Peace wear Eastern costume—no hampering Western clothes to take their minds from contemplation—and she was bitten by a snake—"

"A snake, *Madame?* You interest me.

What sort of snake was it, if you know?"

"Really, sir," the lady had apparently become tired of his catechism, "I haven't the faintest idea. What sort of snakes usually bite people in this latitude?"

"That is precisely what one asks to know," he answered, but he spoke to the departing dowager's broad back.

"Ah h'm?" he murmured as he drew a gold pencil from his pocket and scribbled a memorandum in his notebook. "This we shall look into, I damn' think."

"What?" I demanded, but our hostess' announcement from the farther room prevented further conversation:

"The Swami has consented to perform a miracle for us. He will demonstrate the power of mind over seeming matter."

"Qu'est-ce-qui?" de Grandin's tightly-waxed wheat-blond mustache was all a-quiver, like the whiskers of an alert tom-cat. "Come, friend Trowbridge, this is something we must not forbear to witness, not by any means."

THE drawing-room lights had been lowered again and the Swami was seated before a small table on which lay an ordinary lead pencil. He put his elbows on his knees and stared intently before him a long moment, then raised slender, ring-decked hands and moved them back and forth above the pencil. Faster and faster moved the undulating hands. It seemed, almost, they wove a pattern of invisible threads in the air. Then slowly, unbelievably, it happened. With a movement almost serpentine the pencil writhed a little, rose a full half-inch, then dropped back, the metallic band that held its rubber tip making a faint clicking sound against the polished table top. The Swami's hands wove fresh patterns above it, came together with a soft clap, then separated slowly. And as they drew apart the pencil rose unsteadily, wavered drunkenly a moment at an acute angle and, almost against its will, it seemed, balanced on its sharpened point. The half-lit room seemed vibrant with something unseen and unholy. I had a sudden feeling of uncanny dread, as if I'd witnessed the raising of a dead and stiffened body. For a moment the insensate bit of rubber, wood and graphite stood upright as a toe-dancer executing a pirouette, then, falling drunkenly sidewise, rolled off the polished table to the floor.

"How wonderful! Marvelous! Miraculous!" the whispered comments ran around the shadowed room.

The Swami leant back in his chair, a look of physical exhaustion on his face. "Thought," he murmured tiredly, "only thought is strong. What you have seen, my friends, is but a manifestation of the power of the will. That we call matter is of no consequence, no poteney. The vaunted science of the West cannot explain such things; the stupid, cold religions of the West have nothing concrete to offer. Their story-books are full of tales of miracles and wonders, all worked in the long-ago. But if you ask them for a miracle today—even such a little thing as that which I have done just now—they turn to vague excuses, saying that the age of miracles is past—"

De Grandin had tiptoed to the hall now, as the Swami paused a moment, he came back into the drawing room, his silver-headed stick beneath his elbow. *"Pardonnez-moi,* Monsieur Swami," he interrupted, "but here is one who does not subscribe to your thesis. In one of those story-books which you deride it is recorded how Pharoah's necromancers cast their rods upon the earth and they became live, hissing serpents. And when Aaron, Moses' brother, cast his staff upon the ground, it likewise became a serpent and devoured those rod-serpents of Pharoah's sorcerers. *Regardez-moi, s'il vous plait—"* He dropped into a chair opposite the Swami, braced his stick between his knees and began to make passes over it. "You vitalized a little, insignificant lead-pencil, Monsieur Swami. *Très bon.* Me, I shall call a walking stick to life. *Attendez!"*

He waved slim hands above the silver knob of the cane a moment, and the upright stick fell from between his knees, almost struck the floor, then, rallying with a wavering, uncertain movement, slowly rose until it stood upright upon its ferrule. For a moment it swayed gently, then rose clear of the floor and fell clattering to the polished boards at his feet.

He rose and bowed to the assemblage as if he were an actor on a stage, but no applause greeted his exhibition. "What, is

there none to show appreciation of my *jongleríe?*" he demanded. "For shame, *messieurs et 'dames.* Is it that you seek an explanation? *Bien.*. I show you. Lights, if you will be so kind," and as the lights snapped on, he took the cane up and showed them a three-foot length of black suture silk attached to it. "You see, I fasten this small thread to the stick, then I take the ends between my hands—so." He drew the string taut, and the cane rose till it stood upon its ferrule. *"Très bien.* Then I loosen the thread, and the cane she leans from side to side. When I once more tighten the thread she comes back to the vertical. *C'est très simple, n'est-ce-pas?* It is an old, old juggler's trick, one that I learned in boyhood. Yes, certainly.

"'Ah, but,' you say, 'the Monsieur Swami had no thread to make his pencil dance upon its tip. He are a really-truly supernatural someone.' Ah, bah!" So quickly none of us divined his purpose, he lashed a hand out, thrust his fingers into the Swami's waistcoat pocket and dragged out the pencil with which the miracle had been worked. From its upper end, close to the metal cap that held the rubber to the wood, there dangled eighteen inches of hair-fine black silk thread.

A flush stained the Swami's cheeks and brow, his great dark eyes suffused with tears of embarrassment. "It is a trick," he almost shrieked. "A trick—"

"But certainly, *mon ami,*" the Frenchman laughed delightedly. "A trick it is, and a most good one, too. Come now, confess that you did make the innocent joke tonight. They asked you for to perform some wonder, and you did do it for them. Very well you did it, too. I could not have done it better myself, and I am very clever. Let us make no hard feelings"—he clapped the Swami jovially upon the shoulder—"let us all be jolly friends together."

The amiability he sought to rouse was something less than hilarious, but at least the tension had been broken, and half an hour later we took our leave with a rather wintry good-bye from our hostess.

"NAME of a small green man!" he chuckled delightedly as we drove to my house. "Did I not make a monkey out of him, friend Trowbridge? I think that he will not try to make the dancing pencil very soon again; not before that audience, at any rate."

"H'm," I rejoined. "You surely showed him up, but all the same I have a feeling everything was not as innocent as it seemed. There was an atmosphere of something evil—"

"Parbleu, you felt it, too? I am delighted!"

"Delighted!"

"But certainly. I had a feeling of *malaise,* of something sinister and ugly, directly I went into that room where he drooled his senseless dribble, but I am the suspicious one. I have traveled much among the fakirs, and seen the so-called holy men at their unholy monkey-business. I do not like or trust those ones. To me they have the odor of dead fish.

"It was no parlor trick that he performed tonight, my friend. He was in deadly earnest, and would have let the imposition stand, had I not unmasked it. It was as false as his philosophy and his alleged religion, but—did you take note of that gathering?" he changed the subject abruptly.

"How do you mean?"

"Its composition. Did you notice the preponderance of women? And what sort of women? Not young, not old, but middle-aged.

"A very dangerous age indeed, my friend. Too old for romance, yet too young for resignation, and obviously well supplied with cash. Such people make the ideal victims for the charlatan. I damn think I shall follow the investigation of this Monsieur Swami further in the morning. Yes, certainly."

HE WAS late for dinner the next evening, and when he came in there was that expression in his little round blue eyes that told me he had made an important discovery. "Well?" I demanded as we took our seats.

"Non, my dear, good friend, I do not think that it is well," he denied as he sipped his Martini. "Upon the contrary, I fear that it is very not-so-well. I have apologized to Monsieur Doniphan and agreed to take his case."

"You mean you'll be a party to having Austine declared insane—"

"Better temporarily insane than dead, *mon vieux*. Perhaps she will be both before this business has come to its end. Attend me, if you please," he leveled his soup spoon at me. "This morning I went to the court house and asked to see the wills that have been probated in the last three months."

"Yes?"

"*Oui-da*. Among them I did find the one I sought, that of the poor dear Mademoiselle Santho, of whom the lady of the several chins told us last night. Dear she may have been, but certainly she was not poor. She had a comfortable fortune, oh, a very comfortable one of two hundred thousand dollars. And what did she do with it, I ask you? *Parbleu*, she willed it to her dear friend the Swami Ramapali! What do you make from that?"

"Undue influence?"

"Indubitably. Damn yes. But there is something more, a something sinister that does not leap immediately to the eye. She died, if you recall, of snake-bite."

"Yes, I remember hearing that."

"Very well, or, more precisely, very bad. She made her will upon a Wednesday. Upon the following day, Thursday, she was bitten fatally by a snake. Was it not a most accommodating serpent who dispatched her so conveniently and quickly?"

"Good heavens, d'ye think—"

"Not yet, my friend. I do not think. I am like a blind man in an unfamiliar place. I feel about me, grope for something which will show me where I am and how I should proceed, and what is it my searching fingers find? Nothing, *pardieu!* Nothing at all. It may be that I raise the shadow of a bugaboo unnecessarily, but—can you spare tomorrow morning to go out to Monsieur Swami's colony where Mademoiselle Austine has taken residence? I should greatly like to see that place."

IT WAS evident that Swami Ramapali did not welcome visitors to the colony, for a cement wall some ten feet high surrounded the grounds, and the morning sunlight glinted on the raw edges of a triple row of broken bottles set in mortar on its top. The only entrance was a narrow door of heavy planking reinforced with iron straps and fitted at man's height with a little wicket through which callers might be inspected.

De Grandin struck a sharp, authoritative knock on the door, then, as no answer came to his hail, repeated the summons more loudly. The wicket in the door flew open abruptly and a dark face topped by a soiled white cotton turban scowled at us. "Go away," the porter ordered. "Your noise annoys the silence of this holy place."

"*Tiens*, Monsieur Dirty-Hat, you will experience even more annoyance if you do not make your door open all soon. I am Dr. Jules de Grandin and this is Dr. Samuel Trowbridge, and we would talk with Mademoiselle Austine Doniphan. Conduct us to her quickly, if you please."

The panel snapped shut suddenly as it had opened, and we were left to view the door again in silence.

"*Queue d'un rat mort*, they shall not shut their twenty-times-accursed door in our faces!" de Grandin swore. "They shall not—"

The heavy door swung open slowly and the porter greeted us with a salaam. "Be pleased to enter through the Gateway to Peace," he announced sonorously.

"Ah, now, my friend, you use the gas for culinary purposes," de Grandin complimented as we stepped across the threshold.

We followed our guide down a long alley lined with little cement hutches no larger than good-sized dog houses and, like dog houses, having only one opening shaped like an inverted U and so low that whoever entered would have to crawl on hands and knees. Crossing the alleyway were other even narrower passages, apparently forming a series of concentric circles radiating from a low one-story structure of stucco with a pagoda-like roof and low porch surrounded by a series of interlaced trefoil arches. There was no sign of life in the street through which we passed, but in the transverse alleys we caught glimpses of white-robed figures kneeling before the kennel-like houses, heads bent, hands clasped in what seemed silent contemplation. Curiously enough, several of them seemed to combine cigarettes with their devotions, for we saw them raise the little paper tubes to their mouths, draw

deeply at them, and blow smoke slowly from their nostrils.

We reached the central structure, mounted the low single step that led to its veranda and paused before a curtained doorway. "Proceed into the presence of the Sublimity," our guide bade, holding back the hanging of striped cotton goods that draped the doorway, and we stepped into the almost total darkness of a bare, unfurnished room. As my eyes became accustomed to the gloom I descried a seated figure at the far side of the apartment. He was squatting on a large pillow, legs crossed, feet folded sole-upward upon his calves, hands resting palm-up in his lap, with fingertips barely touching. As far as I could see his costume consisted of a sheet of saffron-yellow cotton loosely belted at the waist, leaving arms, chest, legs and feet uncovered. His head was bowed, nor did he look up as we entered, but:

"You would speak with her who in the world was known as Austine Doniphan?" he asked in a low voice, and instantly I recognized the Swami Ramapali.

But how changed! Where there had been luxuriant dark hair the night we saw him at the Tenbroeck house we now saw only naked scalp, for his head was shaven smooth as an egg, giving him at once a curiously infantile and aged appearance.

De Grandin bent a sharp look on him. "It seems that I was right, Monsieur Swami," he announced. "I could have sworn that you were crowned with a wig. Your hair, apparently, is no more genuine than your magic—"

"You would speak with her who in the world was known as Austine Doniphan?" the Swami interrupted in the same low, level voice.

"By blue, we would, and quickly, if you please, *Monsieur*. My patience is no longer than my nose, and nature has not gifted me with a long proboscis."

The Swami struck his hands together with a sharp clap. "Bid Savatri to the presence," he ordered as our late guide paused upon the threshold with a deep salaam.

We waited for perhaps five minutes while de Grandin and the Swami seemed to be engaged in seeing who could stare the other down, then a shaft of sunlight stabbed the shadows as the doorway curtain was pulled back and a girl stepped soundlessly into the room.

I HAD not seen Austine Doniphan for some time, and probably should not have recognized her if I'd passed her in the street. Certainly the odd figure which crept into our presence bore no resemblance to the girl I'd known. Her costume seemed to consist of some yards of soiled white cotton cloth wrapped round and round her body from bosom to ankles almost as tightly as mummy-bandages. Her arms and shoulders were uncovered, as were her feet and ankles, and so tightly was the cotton bound about her knees that she walked like a hobbled animal, setting one foot precisely before the other, and turning her hips with an exaggerated motion. A loose end of her winding sheet had been brought up to drape her head with a sort of veil, secured by a long wooden pin passed through cloth and hair. Her arms were held stiffly at her sides, hands at right angles to wrists, palms parallel to the floor. On her brow above the bridge of her nose a small daub of bright vermilion showed like a fresh wound against the skin.

Her eyes were large and fine, with long, silky lashes, and though her face was thin with sunken-cheeked thinness, there was no evidence of ill-health. I recognized the symptom. Primary emaciation resulting from sudden diminution of diet.

Looking neither right nor left, without so much as indicating by the lifting of an eyebrow that she saw us, she slipped forward with her oddly creeping walk and came to a halt before the Swami.

A moment she paused thus, head bent demurely, hands clasped together palm to palm, the fingers pointing downward, then like a hinged dummy she sank to her knees, raised both hands above her head, bent forward, laying them upon the floor palm-upward, and dropped her forehead between them.

"Name of a name!" de Grandin swore. "This is indecent, this! Arise, thou foolish one, stand on thy feet—"

"Rise, follower of the Eternal Truth," the Swami bade, and at the command the girl struggled to her knees, awkwardly, for the tightness of her winding-sheet was like a fetter, raised her hands above her head and joined them palm to palm, but kept

her eyes downcast. "Look on these men," he ordered. "Dost thou know them?"

She cast a quick, almost frightened glance in our direction, then bent her head again. "I know one of them, Sublimity. He is a friend of my father—"

The Swami struck his palms together sharply. "Remember thy oath, Savatri! Thou has no father nor mother, nor any friends or kin. Thy every thought is centered on the Infinite Eternal—"

The girl lurched forward till she lay full-length before him and beat her forehead on the floor. "Forgive, forgive, Sublimity! Be patient with the dullest of thy pupils!" Her self-abasement was so complete that I felt almost sick with embarrassment for her.

"Proceed, then, but be mindful of your vow," he ordered.

"One of them, Sublimity, was known to me in the house wherein I dwelt in the world of ignorance," she replied in a low, frightened voice as she once more struggled to her knees. "He was a doctor—a physician who in his ignorance pretended to have power to cure the ills of the flesh—"

"Instruct him, Savatri," the Swami nodded to her.

"Dr. Trowbridge," she turned her great eyes, large and gentle as a gazelle's, full on me, "I pity you. You struggle in the dark, even as I did before the light of Truth Eternal fell on me. Do you not know, you foolish old man; that what we call the flesh, the body, all that we think material, are but the faintest shadows of shadows, and nothing real exists in the universe but thought? By treating what we call our bodies with contempt, by starving them, tormenting them, bringing them to utter and complete subjection, we weaken them but strengthen our souls. Anon we shall succeed in sloughing them away, flinging off the useless and undying—"

"*Cordieu, Mademoiselle,* you interest me," de Grandin broke in. "And the end of it is—"

"Nothing," she replied. "From the Infinite we came, and slowly toward the Infinite we struggle through countless incarnations. At last we shall attain perfection and be absorbed into the Infinite, all trace of self—of what you call the personality—forever lost and blotted out."

"Well said, my pupil," the Swami commended softly. "But is not the Way of Truth too hard for you? I have thought sometimes you were not able to endure the task of bodily subjection—"

"Sublimity!" Austine fell forward on her face and clasped her hands across her bowed neck. "Have gracious pity! Do not send me hence, I beg! If I have faltered in my duty it was not because I lacked the will; I had not strength to beat the flesh into complete subjection—"

THERE was something subtle and beguiling in the soft tone of his voice as he broke in: "For those who have the courage there is a short way to *Kailas*. There is a long and toilsome way, and a short, easy path.

"Omkar holds the door of *Kailas* open for those who would be reabsorbed into the Infinite without necessity for countless reincarnations—"

A tremor like a spasm shook the girl's bowed body. "Sublimity," she panted, "say that I may take that way! Give me leave to go to *Kailas* through *Kurban!* Grant permission for my entry into the Ineffable Nothingness that brings rest and oblivion. I would be *Kurban*, Sublimity!"

"*Grand Dieu!*" de Grandin breathed.

"Ah," the Swami let the syllable out slowly. "Thou has made the choice thyself, Savatri. Remember, only thou canst make the choice—"

"I know, I know!" the girl broke in, breath coming in quick, sobbing gasps. "None but I can make the choice, none in heaven or in earth can revoke it. Record the vow, Sublimity! Freely, fully, voluntarily, I have made the choice. I will be *Kurban!*"

At a sign from the Swami she rose and turned to us. "I'm sorry, Dr. Trowbridge," she said gently, every trace of the frenzy that had possessed her completely gone. "You can never understand, neither can the others. I have come here of my own free will, and here I shall remain. In this place I have found such peace as I had never hoped to find on earth. Thank you for coming, and good-bye. I go to greater joys than ever woman knew before." She stretched a slender hand out, took mine in

a firm clasp, and turned away with a murmured, "Peace be with you."

"See here," I told the Swami as Austine slipped from the room, "I don't know what all this nonsense is about, but it's obvious to me Miss Doniphan is not sound mentally. I came here to observe her, and in my opinion she's not responsible—"

"You think so?" Ramapali interrupted sarcastically. "However unusual her actions may have seemed at first, you can hardly say she seemed irrational when she left, Dr. Trowbridge. Do you honestly believe any jury would commit her to an institution if she appeared as normal as she did a moment since? Perhaps you'll see things in a different light when you have thought them over."

"*Eh bien, Monsieur* Swami, we have not yet begun our thinking, I assure you," answered Jules de Grandin. "It may be we shall meet again—"

"I greatly doubt it, Dr. de Grandin," the Swami broke in. "Now, if you will excuse me—I would resume my contemplation."

"*Au 'voir, Monsieur*, but by no means *adieu*," de Grandin answered as he turned on his heel.

IT WAS shortly after three o'clock that afternoon when he called up to ask permission to bring a friend to dinner. "A most delightful person, friend Trowbridge. An Indian gentleman named Ram Chitra Das who has been most kind and helpful, and I will be more so. Yes."

Mr. Das proved a pleasant surprise. I had had visions of a sloe-eyed Oriental with a pink or green turban and an air of insufferable condescension. Had I not known his origin I should have mistaken the man de Grandin brought to dinner for a Spaniard or Italian. His dark eyes were alert and keen with more than a suggestion of humor in them, his features small and regular, his tailoring faultless and his accent reminiscent of Oxford. He was, it appeared, the son of the tenth son of a Nepalese princeling who had so far forgotten the conventions as to fall in love with and actually marry a *nautchni*—a solecism comparable to an American parson's son marrying a burlesque strip-teaser. But because the old prince loved his son, and because the son was so far removed from the throne that the possibility of his succession was practically nil, the only punishment inflicted was banishment on a pension which equaled the income he would have enjoyed had he remained in the palace.

Ram Chitra Das was born in British India and for his first ten years was educated by a queer mixture of Mission School and native *gurus'* teaching. It was his father who insisted on his English education and his mother who saw that he received the training of a high-caste Hindu. "The dear old girl was frightfully keen on the princely blood, you know, even though the strain had begun to run pretty thin by the time it reached me."

When he was ten his father sent him to a good public school in England. He had been only fifteen when the World War broke out, but was given a commission as subaltern in an Indian regiment, fought in France, took his degree at Oxford after the war, and returned to India as a member of the Intelligence Section of the British Indian Police.

"Lord, no, I'm no Brahmin," he laughed when I commented on the ample justice he had done the roast beef at dinner. "The pater's caste was broken when he married the mater, you know, and whatever caste I had was smashed to bits when I crossed the ocean to England. I hadn't any desire to go through the disagreeable ceremony of having it restored. Sometimes I wonder what I really am. I was nurtured in the belief of the old gods of Hind, and several English parsons, not to mention kind old ladies, labored manfully to make a Christian of me. The net result is that I try to follow St. Paul's advice to prove all things and hold fast to that which is good. I've found a lot of good—and some things not entirely to my liking—in all religions."

"But you recall your early training?" de Grandin asked.

"Oh, yes, just as a worldly Christian adult recalls the catechisms he learned as a child. Like this, you mean?" He looked about him, finally crossed the drawing room and took a tiny ivory figure from a curio cabinet. It was perhaps an inch high and represented a peacock with spread tail.

Placing it on the coffee table, he stared fixedly at it, elbows on knees, hands inter-

laced beneath his chin. A moment—two—went by, and I experienced a slight chill along my spine as I saw the carved ivory rise half an inch from the table, circle round as if in flight, then settle down at least a foot from the spot where he had placed it.

"Why, that's the trick the Swami did!" I exclaimed, but Mr. Das shook his head.

"No, Dr. Trowbridge, that's the trick this fellow you call Ramapali pretended to do, and which Dr. de Grandin exposed so neatly. I assure you I had no strings tied to your peacock, and you saw that my hands were motionless and never nearer than my chin to the ivory."

"But—that's magic. True magic."

AGAIN he shook his head. "I wouldn't call it that, sir, although there are many who would. I don't pretend to understand it, any more than the dear old ladies who practice table tipping can explain why lifeless wood will vibrate and dance all round the parlor beneath their fingers. But just as I'm perfectly sure that spooks have nothing to do with the movements of the ladies' tables, I'm certain that neither gods nor demons had anything to do with making that bit of ivory seem to defy gravity. It's just one of those things for which we have no ready explanation—yet."

"Now," his laughing eyes became suddenly serious, "I'm interested in this Swami Ramapali, as he calls himself. From what Dr. de Grandin tells me, I think I know him. Some twenty years ago a young man named Michael Quinault was sent to jail in Bombay for practicing Christian wiles on the heathen in his blindness. He had been some sort of confidence man in the States, I understand. He certainly lacked confidence that day in Bombay when the judge sahib sentenced him to five years penal servitude for fleecing a Parsee widow out of her insurance money.

"He really should have thanked the judge, however, for jail proved just the thing he needed. No"—as I prepared a question"—it didn't reform him. It opened up new vistas. In jail he made the acquaintance of our slickest native criminals, and they can be very slick, believe me. He got a smattering of Hindustani, and a fair working knowledge of Hindu philosophy and religion. Learned something about Yoga, too. In fine, when he came out he was equipped to palm himself off as a genuine *guru*—that means holy man, or teacher, sometimes miracle-worker—on anybody not too well acquainted with the genuine article. He also had another souvenir of imprisonment. A severe case of fever had made him totally and permanently bald as an egg. That might have proved a handicap to most; it was a valuable asset to him in his new role of religious teacher and revealer of the Truth. We hear of him occasionally—he's swindled his way clear across the continent of Europe and the British Isles with his merry little masquerade, and done a handsome business in the States. His victims are nearly always women. There is a certain type of Western woman to whom anything oriental is simply resistless, just as there's a type of oriental female who can't resist a Western man. He's an adept at picking his—what is it you chaps call 'em?—suckers?

"If it were just a matter of separating credulous ladies from their cash I shouldn't be so much concerned. That sort of thing's been going on since time began, and will probably continue till eternity replaces time. But from what Dr. de Grandin tells me there's something far more serious involved here."

"Indeed?" I answered. "What?"

"Murder."

"Murder?" I echoed, horrified.

"Murder, *parbleu!*" de Grandin seconded. "Consider, if you please: This Mademoiselle Santho who willed her whole estate to the Swami Ramapali-Quinault, then so conveniently shuffled off the mortal coil by snake-bite. I was greatly interested in her. So to the Bureau of Vital Statistics I went and looked at her death certificate. It was signed by Dr. William Macwhyte of Tunlaw Mills. You know him?"

"No."

"So did I. But I made his acquaintance. According to his report he was roused from bed early in the morning to minister to a lady at the Swami's colony who had been bitten by a serpent. 'What sort of serpent?' I ask him.

"'A rattlesnake,' he tells me.

"'Indeed?' I asked to know. 'And did you

you satisfy yourself concerning this, *cher collège?*"

"'But certainly,' he tells me. 'She was bitten in the ankle. The venom was injected directly into the posterior tibial artery about four inches above the astragalus. Death must have supervened within a very short time. There were the characteristic punctures where the fangs had pierced the epidermis and the derma to the subcutaneous tissue; slight lividities around the wounds, and considerable coagulation of the blood.'"

"Does it not leap to the eye?"

"Perhaps it leaps to yours. Not to mine."

"Forgive me, friend Trowbridge. I do forget you are a general practitioner, and though a very skillful one, not familiar with reptile bites. The venom of the rattlesnake destroys the protoplasm of the blood, rendering it uncoaguable. It is about ninety-eight percent blood-destroying in its action. The venom of the cobra, *tout le contraire*, permits the blood to thicken, since its action is a swift paralysis, the poison attacking the nerve centers at once, and being only two to five percent blood-destroying. You see?"

"Can't say I do."

"*Mordieu*, I did forget. Perhaps you did not read him: Just two weeks prior to la Santho's death two cobras—king cobras, *ophiophagus elaps*—were secretly abstracted from the reptile house at the zoological garden. I remembered reading of it in *le Journal* and wondering who would be such a great fool as to steal two six-foot tubes of sudden death. Then, when I put the pieces of the so unfortunate lady's death-puzzle together, 'Jules de Grandin,' I say to me, 'we have something here, Jules de Grandin,' and 'It are indubitably as you say, Jules de Grandin,' I reply to me, 'Just what it are we have I do not rightly know, but beyond the question of a doubt, we have something.'"

He turned to Ram Chitra Das. "Tell him what *Kurban* means, if you will be so kind," he ordered.

"*Kurban*," the Indian replied, "means self-immolation, the offering of oneself voluntarily as a human sacrifice. A Hindu woman may find quick access to *Kailas*—heavenly oblivion—by voluntarily offering herself as a sacrifice on the altar of Okmar, which is one of Siva's less admirable attributes. Or a widow, who is doomed to countless incarnations for the sin of having permitted her husband to predecease her, may avert the curse by *Kurban*. Perfectly ridiculous, of course, yet it differs more in degree than kind from the Christian woman's entering a convent or enlisting in the Salvation Army or going as a nurse in a lepersorium."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "We heard her say she wanted to become *Kurban*—"

"*Précisément*," de Grandin agreed. "I, too, heard it. Therefore, my friends, in half an hour Captain Chenevert of the State *gendarmerie* will meet us on the Andover Road, and to that sixty-three-times damned colony we go to see what happens. Are you with us, *mon vieux?*" he turned to Mr. Das.

"Oh, absolutely, old thing. This Quinault bloke led our police a merry chase. I'd like to be in at the death."

A HIGHWAY patrol car waited for us a mile or so out on the Andover Road, and as we drew abreast, Captain Chenevert thrust his head from a window. "Good evening, Dr. de Grandin; evening, Dr. Trowbridge," he greeted. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Das," as de Grandin introduced our guest. "What's all this hush-hush stuff about? If I hadn't worked with you before and didn't know you've always got something on the ball I'd have said, 'The hell with it,' tonight. I've got a big day tomorrow—"

"*Parbleu*, my worthy one, and you shall have a fine large night of it tonight, or Jules de Grandin is more greatly mistaken than he thinks! But yes."

Briefly he outlined the situation, and Chenevert's lips pursed in a soundless whistle. "Baldy Quinault?" he murmured. "Masqueradin' as a Hindu faker an' bumpin' women off with trick snakes. Well, what d'ye know? Let's get going."

"Softly, my friends, be silent, I implore you!" de Grandin bade as we drew up before the entrance-way of the colony. "We must make no noise—"

At his gestured command we flattened ourselves to the wall and he struck three

peremptory knocks on the door. There was no answer, but after the third repetition of the summons the wicket shot back, and though we could not see from our positions, we knew the porter looked through the spy-hole.

De Grandin crouched out of the warder's line of vision, silent as a shadow, till the wicket slammed shut, then beat three thunderous blows upon the planking of the gate. This time the response was instantaneous. The wicket shot back violently, the porter took a second look, then, seeing nothing, slipped the heavy bar from its braces and swung the door back a few inches, thrusting his head out.

Merci bien; merci bien une mille fois—a thousand thanks, my friend!" de Grandin chuckled. His blackjack swung in a short arc, not downward where its impact would have been cushioned by the fellow's turban, but sidewise, so that it took him squarely on the frontal bone and dropped him to his knees like a steer bludgeoned on the killing floor of a slaughter house.

Chenevert took over momentarily. "Two of you stay here," he ordered the four troopers who accompanied him. "If this bird comes out of it, see that he doesn't raise a holler. McCarty, you and Hansen come with me. Have your riot guns ready; we're apt to need 'em in a hurry. Okay, Dr. de Grandin. It's your ball from here on."

NOT a light showed anywhere, nor was there any sign of life among the little buildings of the colony, but from the central structure came a muted wailing of reed pipes played in tuneless unison and the muttering rhythm of a tom-tom. "*Ah-ha!*" the Frenchman whispered. "They have lost no time, these ones. Forward, *mes enfants!*"

Stepping high to avoid unseen obstacles, breathing through our mouths lest our respiration betray us, we hastened toward the central building, mounted its low single step and paused a breathless moment at its curtained doorway. "*Entrez, mais en silence!*" ordered Jules de Grandin.

Twin bronze braziers burned at the far side of the room, shedding a ruddy glow that stained rather than lightened the darkness of the place, and from them curled long spirals of heady incense as kneeling women fed handsful of aromatic powder on their glowing charcoal. The air was sickening with the mingled scents of aloes, sandalwood and cedar, and—even mixed with the perfumes of the aromatics its odor could not be disguised—cannabis Indica, the *bhang*, or hashish of the East, the drug of madness compared to which the marijuana of the West is as beer to brandy.

About the darkened room, their robes of cotton shining ghostly, leprous white against the gloom, some thirty figures, mostly women, crouched in attitudes of abject prostration, humming a low, wailing chant and emphasizing its crescendos by rising to their knees, hands held aloft, and clapping them together softly.

The mournful canticle came to a close, and from a farther doorway stepped the Swami Ramapali. His yellow robe had been replaced by a white gown of rhinestone-studded satin, a turban of white silk was bound about his head, and from its knot a brooch of brilliants caught the red reflection of the braziers' glow. Jeweled sandals shod his feet, and in his hand he held a rod of polished wood tipped with a knob shaped like an acorn. At sight of him the congregation groveled on the floor, then as a brazen gong clanged ominously rose to their knees and raised their hands in salute.

Two more deep, clanging strokes came from the unseen gong, and through the curtains of the door behind the Swami came Austine Doniphan. She, too, had changed her costume. Gone was her wrapped robe of soiled cotton, and in its place she wore a short bodice of purple satin and a full skirt of gold tissue bound about the waist and hips with a scarf of crimson silk. Silver anklets clinked and chimed with each step that she took, and band on band of silver circled wrists and arms. Her dark hair had been smoothly parted in the middle, and down the part there ran a streak of vivid red. As I glanced at her bare feet I saw their soles were painted red to match the part in her hair, and when she raised her hands in salute to the Swami I saw their palms were stained a brilliant yellow. Memory rang a horrifying bell in my mind: Years ago I had been told by a missionary that the colors daubed on Austine's

head, hands and feet were thus applied to the bodies of Hindu women whose husbands survived them, and were never smeared on till the time and place of cremation had been fixed.

THE girl bent in a deep salaam to the Swami, then as the gong boomed three dull, brazen strokes, elevated hands above her head, pressed their yellow-painted palms together, and, rising on tiptoe, began gyrating rapidly. Faster and faster she whirled; the weighted hem of her gold-tissue dress rose slowly with centrifugal force until the garment stood out from her like a wheel and she was like a golden-petaled flower of which her white legs were the stem, the stiffly outstanding skirt the blades, and her body from the waist upward, the pistil.

"Look, for God's sake!" rasped Chenevert in my ear, and I choked on a horror-stricken breath as something like a narrow streak of shadow rippled from the doorway just behind the madly whirling girl. It was about the thickness of a steamship's hawser, and about its color, too, and bent and twisted sinuously in a series of conjoined *W*'s, then coiled upon itself until the circle of its body and upreared head were like a giant, obscene *Q*. Then it uncoiled once more, lay upon the floor in a long, twisted line, and reared its wedge-shaped head to thrust forth a forked tongue. Slowly the steely whip of elongated body crept across the floor, nearer the girl's white, whirling feet, nearer—nearer.

The breath stopped in my throat. What was it Dr. Macwhyte had told de Grandin? Estrella Santho had died of snake-venom injected directly into her posterior tibial artery, the great blood vessel that supplies the back of the foot—about four inches above the astragalus or ankle bone.

A ripple of movement showed in the wavering light cast by the braziers and a second cobra joined the first, its sphenoid head raised inquiringly, its molasses-colored tongue flickering forward like a jet of flame.

"Don't shoot!" I heard Chenevert caution the troopers. "They're too close. We'd be sure to hit her—"

Beside me, coming unexpectedly as a clap of thunder on a clear day, there rose a sudden spiral of sound. Not strident, but soft, melodious, lilting, liquid as an ocarina played in middle register. With hands pressed tight against his lips, Ram Chitra Das was imitating the notes of an Indian flute. The music fluctuated from a slender spider-web of sound to a soft and throaty murmur like that of pigeons busy with their courtship. It was in a minor key, the mourning, sad lament that stamps all Oriental music, yet underneath its liquid, muted tones there was the faint suggestion of shrill, spiteful laughter.

The cobras heard it, and halted their zigzagging course toward the madly whirling girl. One of them raised its head questioningly, then the other. Suspiciously they paused a moment, swaying slowly, uncertainly, then turned away from Austine and faced Ram Chitra Das. The foremost snake raised half a yard of mottled body from the floor, and as it reared itself the hood behind its head expanded slowly till it looked like a gigantic toadstool fastened to the sinuous barrel of its body just behind the head. The second cobra seemed to struggle for a moment, then, like the first, began to rise. Slowly, apparently unwillingly, they rose and rose; now they were balancing upon what seemed no more than half a foot of coiled tail, and their heads swayed slowly with a circular motion in time to the flute's rhythm.

"Get her to hell away from there!" Ram Chitra Das brought his cupped hands down from his lips an instant. "I'll hold the snakes—be quick!"

"Take her, Trowbridge, *mon vieux*," de Grandin cried as he kicked his way through the groveling congregation toward the Swami. "Take her in your arms and bear her hence. This one is mine!"

Avoiding the charmed snakes as widely as I could, I put my arms about Austine and drew her to me. She made no struggle as I lifted her, but lay as limp and helpless as a woman in a swoon.

The little Frenchman's fist shot out and cracked against the Swami's chin with a sharp impact. "*Hola, mon ami*," he cried, "here is company you did not expect at your party!" A second uppercut sent the Swami reeling back against the wall, and before

he could regain his balance handcuffs snapped upon his wrists. "I make you arrested for the murder of Estrella Santho and the attempted murder of Austine Doniphan, Michael Quinault alias Ramapali," de Grandin announced. "This time, *par la barbe d'un babouin rouge*, I think you will not beat the rap. No, not at all, by damn it!"

Ram Chitra Das had followed us, and stood above the swaying cobras. "*Hayahbou!*" he cried as he ceased humming the flute-tune. "The dance is ended, favored ones of Brahm. The time for rest has come!"

Slowly, as if they had been lowered on invisible threads, the almost erect snakes sank to the floor and lay there inertly, quivering slightly, but giving no further sign of life. Unceremoniously as if he gathered up two lengths of rope Ram Chitra Das picked them up, seizing them carefully behind the head, and bore them, tails trailing flaccidly on the floor, through the doorway whence they had emerged.

"Nobody move!" Chenevert's voice rang like metal striking metal. "You're all under arrest as material witnesses. Take 'em in charge, McCarty."

"MOST of it's plain," I told de Grandin as he, Ram Chitra Das and I disposed of a bottle of champagne in my study some hours later. "I'm frank to admit, though, that what was plain as a pikestaff to you meant nothing to me until you'd pointed it out. But how d'ye account for Austine's apparent desire to offer herself as a sacrifice? Self-preservation is one of the strongest instinctive urges—"

"In normal people, yes," he agreed. "But this young woman, like all too many of her generation, is definitely neurotic. We all have a queer streak in us somewhere, and if the streak becomes too wide we are thrown off our mental balance. Man's innate impulse, as we know all too well, is to take, and woman's is to give. It is this 'give complex'—a series of emotionally accented impulses in a suppressed state—that fills our hospitals with nurses, that makes daughters devote their lives to selfish parents, keeps women true to underserving husbands. But when this natural trend in woman gets out of hand it becomes pathological. We call it masochism, sometimes algolagnia. Very well. Consider:

"She is neurotically unbalanced, this Mademoiselle Austine. Guided in the proper channels her over-developed 'give impulse' might have made her a second Florence Nightingale. Alas, it had no guidance. It was left to run riot, and her inhibitions were naturally less strong than those of normal young women. When first we met her in the colony of the Swami I thought that I detected the scent of cannibis Indica—hashish—on her hair and garments. This drug, as you know, has a powerful tendency to increase dormant, suppressed desires, to render them unnaturally—sometimes overwhelmingly—strong. When Captain Chenevert and I went through the Swami's private rooms we found hundreds of drugged cigarettes—tobacco mixed with hashish—what you call reefers. These he had systematically led his followers to smoke until they had become addicts, living in an unreal world of drug-created fantasy, wholly free from the inhibitions which ordinary sane people possess as brakes upon their impulses, especially their unnatural or 'queer' impulses. Yes. Certainly. Of course.

"Now, when one takes a sensitive, neurotic young woman and keeps her in a virtually continuous state of drug-intoxication for upward of three months she makes a fertile soil in which suggestion—either good or bad—may be implanted. Constantly, without remission, this so vile Quinault had dinned into her ears the suggestion that she give herself as a sacrifice—that she become *Kurbani*. She had completely lost whatever inhibitions she once had. Her instinct for self-preservation was entirely blotted out, and her natural womanly instincts cried incessantly 'give—give—*give!*' with thousand-tongued insistence, until she felt the only way to happiness lay in offering herself as a sacrifice.

"You remember when she told the Swami she would become *Kurbani*? She hesitated for a long moment before she made the declaration, then all at once she burst out with the offer of herself so frenziedly that she could scarcely make her words coherent. That was entirely symptomatic. So was the

calm that followed when she had made the hard choice. They had so constantly suggested the act to her that her poor drugged brain had come to regard it as inevitable. Natural love of life had fought against the act, but when she'd finally given way and made the decision to become *Kurban* she felt a positive relief. The long, hard, losing struggle had come to an end.

"The poor Mademoiselle Santho was less fortunate. Hef they inveigled into making a will leaving her fortune to the unspeakable Quinault, then killed her ruthlessly. Mademoiselle Austine was next in line, and when we finish our investigation I am convinced that we shall find that every person in that colony is wealthy in his own right, and able to dispose of a neat fortune by will. Yes, I am certain.

"Some they would have killed as they killed la Santho and attempted to kill Mademoiselle Austine. The others they would have blackmailed mercilessly, for all of them were parties to the murders in a way, and would have paid and paid to keep their part in them from being known. But of course—"

"Why did you take those cobras up?" I asked Ram Chitra Das. "You could have killed them easily enough."

The Indian grinned amiably at me. "I didn't serve with the police for nothing, sir. Those snakes alive will make good evidence against Quinault when they try him for the murder of Miss Santho and the attempted murder of Miss Doniphan. They'd have been no use to us if I had killed them."

"Mon brave," the little Frenchman complimented. "My old wise one! *Morbleu*, but you do think of everything! Come, let us have another little so small drink"—he refilled our glasses and raised his toward the Indian—"to your cleverness, which is second only to de Grandin's, my friend!"

Arkham House announces . . .

THE DOLL AND ONE OTHER

A New Book by ALGERNON BLACKWOOD!

An entirely new book by Algernon Blackwood is a literary event. Never before published in any form, the two long stories which make up this new title are representative of the best in supernatural literature. "No one has even approached the skill, seriousness, and minute fidelity with which Blackwood records the overtones of strangeness in ordinary things," wrote H. P. Lovecraft. "The one absolute and unquestioned master of weird atmosphere!" **"The Doll"** and **"The Trod"** are the first new stories by Algernon Blackwood in almost a decade. One concerns an evil image delivered to a London villa to bring danger to Colonel Masters and his small daughter; the other recreates a strange corner of England where the "gay people" appear in the night to lure away the souls of all who behold them. Our printers promise us this new book in December or January. We would appreciate your order now. The jacket is by Ronald Clyne

$3.50

Our other books are going fast. Send in your orders now, without delay, if you hope to add these books to your library!

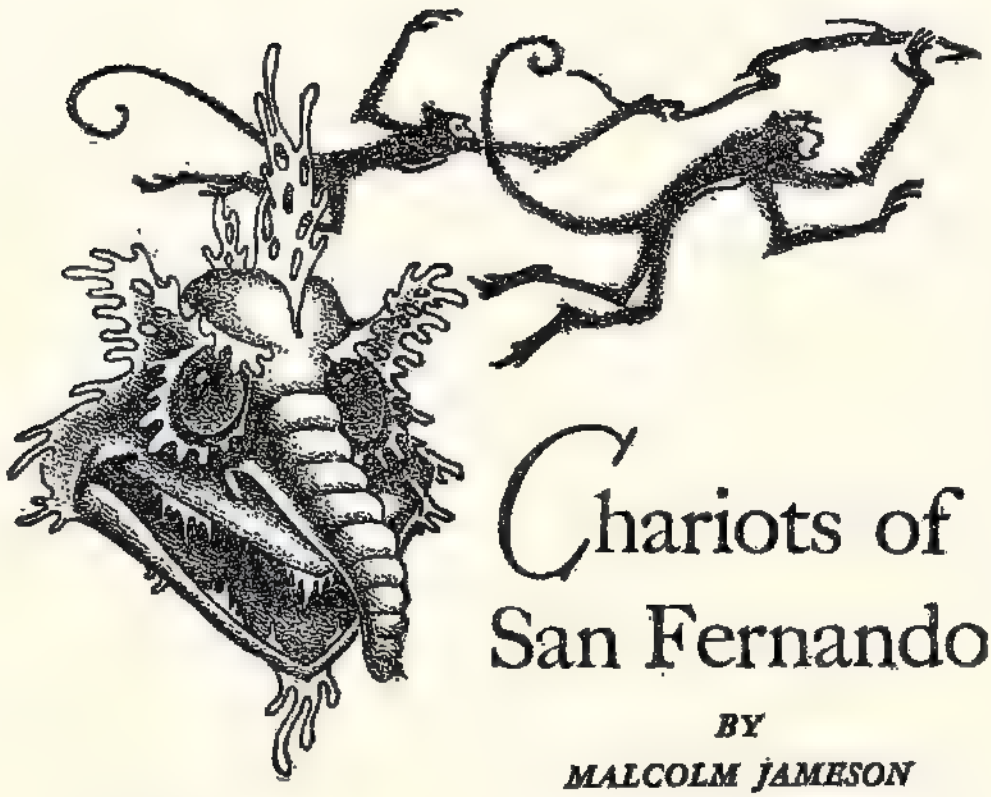
ARKHAM HOUSE, Sauk City, Wisconsin

Please send me the following, for which I enclose payment in full:

..... copies of **THE DOLL AND ONE OTHER** (to be sent on publication), at $3.50.
..... copies of **SOMETHING NEAR**, by August Derleth, at $3.00.
..... copies of **WITCH HOUSE**, by Evangeline Walton, at $2.50.
..... copies of **THE OPENER OF THE WAY**, by Robert Bloch, at $3.00.
..... copies of **THE LURKER AT THE THRESHOLD**, by Lovecraft & Derleth, at $2.50.
..... copies of **GREEN TEA AND OTHER GHOST STORIES**, by J. S. Le Fanu, at $3.00.
..... copies of **THE HOUNDS OF TINDALOS**, by Frank Belknap Long (to be sent on publication), at $3.00.
..... copies of **THE EYE AND THE FINGER**, by Donald Wandrei at $3.00.
..... copies of **JUMBEE AND OTHER UNCANNY TALES**, by H. S. Whitehead, at $3.00.
..... copies of **WHO KNOCKS?**, ed. by August Derleth (Spring, 1946), at $2.00.
..... copies of **LOST WORLDS**, by Clark Ashton Smith, at $3.00.
..... copies of **MARGINALIA**, by H. P. Lovecraft, at $3.00.
..... copies of **SLEEP NO MORE!**, ed. by August Derleth, at $2.00.
..... copies of **"IN RE: SHERLOCK HOLMES,"** by August Derleth, at $2.50.

NAME .....

ADDRESS



Chariots of San Fernando

BY

MALCOLM JAMESON

FOREWORD

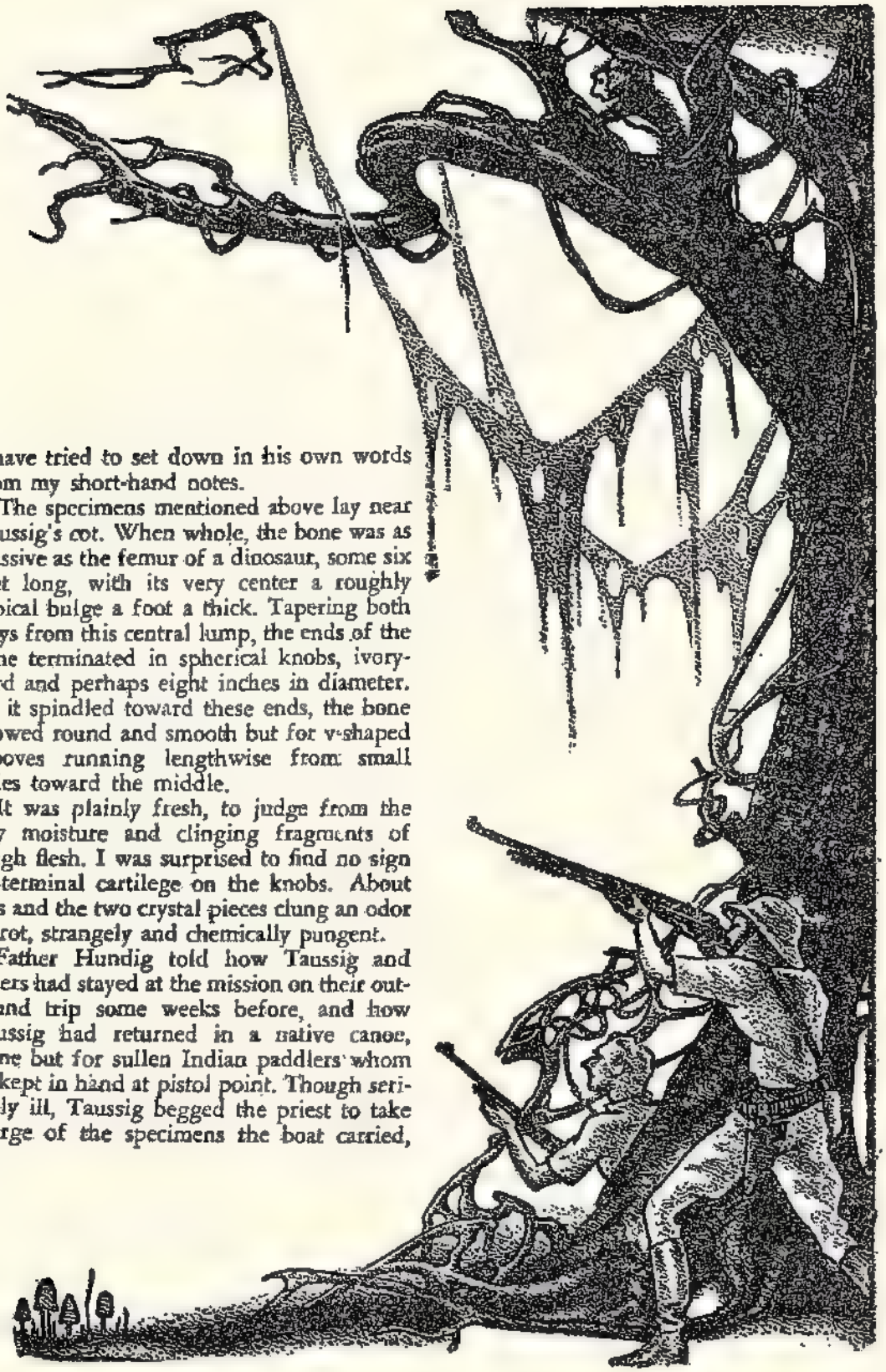
It may be to the credit of the skeptical scientific attitude that no single important group or individual has accepted the sensational account by Dr. Stephen Taussig of the discovery of new, amazing fauna in the San Fernando country at the Amazon's headwaters. Taussig, sole survivor of the Museum of Living Science Expedition, was plainly deranged when he reached the outposts of civilization. Bits of alleged evidence—a glassy object some ten inches long by six wide, of a pointed oval shape and convex like a cupped hand; a length of coiled transparent tubing, perhaps thirty feet long and tapering from the diameter of an inch to half as much; and a huge bone, unfortunately shattered in transit to America—have invited curiosity, but not diagnosis.

I came into the mystery by pure chance. I was secretary-companion three years ago to John J. Beazle, a wealthy dabbler in exploration and adventure, with some pretension to botanical and zoological education, and sailed far up the Amazon in his yacht, the *Tethys*. News came of a white man, sick and delirious, at a settlement on one of the uncharted side-streams. We sought the place and found it to be the outpost Cruxite mission of Youmbinque.

Father Hundig, who was caring for the sick man, welcomed our appearance and loans of bedding, ice and medicines. The patient, though wasted, screamed and struggled so that we could not move him from the missionary's cot. Beazle, not much interested, spent most of the days that followed among liquor bottles on the *Tethys*. It was I who heard Stephen Taussig's story, which

Indian legend swore we were headed for a hell peopled with ***unspeakable devils.***

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV



I have tried to set down in his own words from my short-hand notes.

The specimens mentioned above lay near Taussig's cot. When whole, the bone was as massive as the femur of a dinosaur, some six feet long, with its very center a roughly cubical bulge a foot a thick. Tapering both ways from this central lump, the ends of the bone terminated in spherical knobs, ivory-hard and perhaps eight inches in diameter. As it spindled toward these ends, the bone showed round and smooth but for v-shaped grooves running lengthwise from small holes toward the middle.

It was plainly fresh, to judge from the oily moisture and clinging fragments of tough flesh. I was surprised to find no sign of terminal cartilege on the knobs. About this and the two crystal pieces clung an odor of rot, strangely and chemically pungent.

Father Hundig told how Taussig and others had stayed at the mission on their outbound trip some weeks before, and how Taussig had returned in a native canoe, alone but for sullen Indian paddlers whom he kept in hand at pistol point. Though seriously ill, Taussig begged the priest to take charge of the specimens the boat carried,

then collapsed. The Indians paddled away in patent relief.

The recent death of Father Hundig leaves my account almost unsupported, but his diary might prove interesting to scholars with open minds. Meanwhile, here is Taussig's story, to be read either as scientific data or mere curiosa. I am not expert enough to suggest which.

I

OUR up-river trip was mostly uneventful. All had been well planned and Dooling, who had previously visited this basin, acted as interpreter and go-between with the Indians. We had no difficulty until we reached the confluence of the Caquini.

You must have heard the Indian legends about the San Fernando as a hell peopled with unspeakable devils. We did not fall into the error of disregarding these entirely; savage tabus are often founded on a practical basis. We guessed that in the region were real dangers, perhaps unknown predatory animals, and we hoped to find them and prove how exaggerated folklore can be.

But neither threats nor promises could induce a single native to accompany us beyond the great falls of the Caquini. We were faced with the unsatisfactory job of going ahead without guides or bearers. The solution of the problem was somewhat disquieting.

Two days journey below the falls, we stopped at man's uttermost habitation, the village of the Chicupes. The natives appeared more apprehensive about the country just beyond than any of the down-river peoples.

Their fear had created a bizarre custom—each year they selected two prime warriors to go as sacrifices into the unknown land. If one of these should survive, they said, for the space of a single moon, his safe return would show that the devils had been propitiated. Such a survivor would be rewarded with the chieftainship. But none had ever returned.

By a fortunate coincidence, the selection had been made only a few days before we arrived. The two young warriors were undergoing some interesting rites of purification before leaving. After tedious negotiations and the paying of substantial bribes, we arranged to go along with the party that escorted them.

We had bearers at least, but with them came disquiet. If two warriors, and of the best, went into the San Fernando yearly and did not return, what became of them? We could not guess. Neither, I am sure, can you. But we found out.

A short distance from the falls we established a base camp. Beyond here our Indians would not go. The next three weeks were uneventful. We set up our field laboratories and explored the heavy forest in widening circles. There was little of interest and less of danger in our findings. Hedrick identified some poisonous plants, there were a few snakes and insects, and I shot one wildcat. It was like many another district in the jungle.

Our Indians huddled timorously at our base camp, but we overcame our own sense of vague apprehension. How false were these senses of security we were soon to learn.

As we prepared to move on, only the sacrificial braves, Itai and Tubutu, could be persuaded to help carry our tinned foods, cameras and other supplies. This pair, really splendid youngsters, had slept and eaten apart from their friends, and were seemingly regarded as already dead. Camber remained in charge of the base, with instructions to bring every day as much food and other necessaries as he could carry to a certain advance base we chose as point of departure into the unknown. Hedrick, Dooling and I, with the two Chicupes, pressed on.

Nine miles on our journey, among thinning trees that hinted open savannas ahead, I almost tripped over a neat ball of crushed and splintered bones. Just beyond lay the neatly severed head of a Capuchin monkey. As we gathered to look, there seemed to hang about us a heavy odor more suggestive of the chemical laboratory than the jungle. Hedrick, stooping, identified the smashed bones as belonging to the monkey whose head lay beyond. They were jammed into a rough sphere the size of a melon, broken and pressed as if by some ramming device, and covered with chemical-smelling slime.

"Looks as if it had been chewed up and

spat out," commented Hedrick. "But what jaws could crumple a pelvis like that?"

As to the head, it had been sliced off as smoothly as by a machete, and its hair was dry and clean. None of us could think of an animal large enough to take such a bite with, at the same time, such sharp, guillotine-like incisors. We rejected both lions and anacondas. Whatever had killed the monkey would be in a class by itself, a class unknown to us, a class that might prove decidedly unpleasant to study.

The Indians showed fright, but only for a moment. Steeped in tradition, they seemed to recognize their brotherhood with the monkey's remains. Dooling sniffed the air.

"Silico-ethane," he said. "Where does it come from?" He lifted some slime on a twig. "Here it is. Silicic acid, or I'm an impostor among chemists." He scraped some into a specimen can. "I'll analyze it later."

Hedrick took pictures and we went on.

II

AT THE spot agreed upon, where Camber was to come daily, we made a temporary advanced base. It was about noon, so we ate a snack, then Hedrick and I struck out for a quick look around at what was beyond. We took Itai with us to carry cameras and boxes, but Hedrick and I were burdened only with rifles and machetes. Dooling said he would go to work with his chemicals and hoped to have a report for us when we returned.

Before us was flat country covered with a short grass. A mile in front and away to the left rose a low range of hills, fairly steep, but round-topped and covered with grass. In the far distance we could make out the hazy blue profile of a mountain range. To the right was a high cliff, about a mile distant at its closest, and running straight away from us for as far as we could see. This escarpment marked a great fault that elevated the country beyond and made possible the magnificent falls of the Caquini, ten miles behind. There was a little watercourse that followed the cliff down to the Caquini.

We were soon out of the grass and into a thicket of bushes shoulder high. Hedrick stopped in amazement and examined several of the bushes, pulling long pods from them. He shredded the pod, first smelling and then tasting its contents.

"*Ricinus*, of some sort," he said in response to my questioning look. "Must be a variety of castor bean, but I never expected to see it growing wild in South America. I think I can chalk this up as my great discovery of the day. Yours will be the monkey-killer, if you can track it down."

"It didn't leave tracks," I said. "I looked for them."

Hedrick was quite bucked up over his castor beans. I knew what he was thinking, of how nice it would be to see in print *Ricinus Americanus Hedriquensis*. We all have those little vanities.

The area covered by them was fairly extensive. We reached a little knoll, a foot or so higher than the general level, and we could see that they extended all the way to the cliff, and from the forest on our right to several miles to the left of us. We kept on through them as it was by far the shortest way.

A few hundred yards farther on we both were brought up in surprise to find ourselves in a comparatively clear space. The bushes were all down—some uprooted, all of them broken and torn apart and most of the foliage gone. Lanes led in a dozen directions, like the spokes of a wheel. In these spaces the wreckage of the bushes was appalling. The sight suggested a small scale replica of the damage done by elephants. Here was a new situation to ponder. No one had ever heard of an elephant in this country, and anyway, these would have to be midget elephants.

It was not until we had carefully and minutely examined the ground that we got our first clue. We found wagon tracks!

We checked each of the lanes that led in. Each showed the marks of broad tires with a gauge of nearly six feet! Our previous mystification was nothing to what we felt now. How could there be wagons in an uninhabited country lying hundreds of miles beyond populated country where even a cart was unknown? And such wide wagons, and so many, and in such a place?

When we had seen all there was to see, we went on, following the wagon trail that led straightest toward the water and the cliff.

Under foot all the way were the broken and stripped castor plants. Twice before we reached the far boundary of this extraordinary bean patch we came across much wider places where other wagons had converged and had destroyed a half acre or so of the plants.

Our trail led more or less straight to the foot of the cliff and we finally emerged onto a wide sand-bed that edged the clear creek which ran along the foot of the bluff. Our wagon wheel marks continued straight on into the water, and there they ended! We could see them for a few feet under water, but beyond the running stream erased them. The creek was hardly fifty feet wide, the other bank of it was a towering cliff, rising sheer three hundred feet.

"What a country!" said Hedrick, wiping his brow, after we had had a good drink of the clear water, and refilled our canteens. "I'm beginning to think those Indians have something."

After a brief rest, we turned upstream, walking along close to the water where the sand was damp and firm. Presently we came to more wheel-marks. That cleared the mystery for a moment. Apparently the driver had chosen to come upstream part of the way in the river. Then we came to an intricate criss-cross of tracks, indicating dozens of wagons, in and out of the river, in and out of the beans, up and down the sand-bed, like a circus lot the day after. We traversed a mile of this, conversing from time to time, chiefly to explode each others theories as fast as one would develop some hypothesis to work from.

Even if there had been a reasonable source of wagons, the maze of markings on the sand would still have been of dubious meaning. For one thing, there were no tracks of horses, oxen or other draft animals.

Again, many of the trails were partially obliterated, as if by a drag. We also decided that the carts were two-wheeled, and of various gauges, from six feet to as little as two. As we stooped to measure a trail through the thicket, I saw something round and whitish, half buried in the sand, near the bean stalks. I picked it up.

It was a human skull.

Around the brow was a leather strap, stiff and mouldy, stitched with copper wire—just such a symbol of sacrifice as Itai wore that moment. Beyond lay bones, human but crushed and compacted, like those of the monkey.

I turned to him, with a sign of inquiry. Brave enough, he drew himself up as if at attention.

"Garzus," he muttered, and passed his left hand thrice across his face—the Chicupe counterpart of the sign of the cross to avert evil. There were tears on his brown cheeks, and he was afraid—mortally afraid—for all that he was a picked fighting man of his people.

III

THERE was nothing to be gained by lingering over the relics of the dead Indian; if we were to penetrate the veil of mystery that shrouded these strange deaths we must learn more.

An uneasiness, vague at first, but steadily mounting to a sense of profound apprehension, settled upon us. We had not forgotten those hideous legends. Heretofore we had regarded them as the mad inventions of fanatical witch-doctors or the insane imaginings of superstitious heathens. But now we could not help remembering that no matter in what other respects the myths might differ, they had invariably spoken of the horror of this land of fiends as the "rolling death," and always coupled with that expression had been the dread word "Garzus"—a word signifying "dragon" or "hippogriff."

The wonder grew on us as we speculated whether there could be in this accursed country a ferocious race of aborigines who drove chariots after the fashion of the early Britons. Perhaps in this weird and malignant land there *was* a fearsome creature of a type unguessed; could it be that such a monster drew the war-chariots of the barbarous people of this place? We shrank from that solution. We told ourselves that we must not permit ourselves to be swept away by the psychic vagaries of these credulous savages; that we must retain our grip on our common sense; that we must search, and find more clues until we had found the simple, practical explanation that our rea-

son told us must lie somewhere behind these grotesqueries.

Ahead of us the creek bent outward from the cliff to round a vast hemi-cone of detritus where long ago a section of the cliff had been undercut and fallen down. The widened stream's ripply surface told us that here were shoals that we could cross without serious wetting. Since at this point also there was a convergence of cart tracks leading into the river and evidence of their emergence on the other side, we waded across.

The chariot tracks led around to the downstream face and here we were further astonished to find ourselves in what had every appearance of being a rough quarry. Dozens of half-begun shafts showed where someone had dug into the walls. An inspection of the roughly level floor of the quarry revealed that away from the walls there were a number of mounds of broken limestone and a little slate. Whoever was working here was only interested in the quartz and silicates. On the ground in front of the newest working we found a pile of large quartz crystals mixed with fragments of agate.

I went to pick up a particularly beautiful piece of stone when to my startled disgust I found it covered with slime. As it slithered from my fingers I recognized the revolting odor and texture of the stuff that was smeared on the dead monkey's bones. Half nauseated, I hardly heard Hedrick's cry of astonishment as he pointed to the gobs of jelly lying on the ground on the far side of this collection of rocks. But there they were, enough to fill a gallon bucket, scattered about as if dispersed by the nuzzling snout of some feeding beast. As I wiped my hands, Hedrick collected several pounds of it to take back to Dooling. There was no smell in the air here of silico-ethane; this was chlorine, faint but unmistakable!

"I think we have enough material for one night's insomnia," Hedrick said, "and it's getting late. Let's go back to Dooling."

Back in the trees we found Dooling had made an improvised camp and had food cooking, and on a box we could see a beaker and some test tubes.

"That jelly *is* a silicic acid," Dooling announced, as soon as we joined him, but just which I don't know. It appears to be an organic variety and there's no telling what the formula for it is."

"Take a look at this, then," said Hedrick, handing him the jar with the stuff from the quarry.

It proved to be the same, or closely similar. The last sample was somewhat stiffer than the slimy stuff from the skeleton.

We talked until late that night, but got nowhere with the baffling data we had collected that day. Being together around a cheery fire, and having warm food tended to allay the qualms of misgiving. Tomorrow might bring a solution to part of these riddles.

IV

EARLY the next day, we had left two miles of flat plain behind us and were halfway up the side of the first of the foothills. We had already passed three sets of long-dried bones, of antelope, this time. The layout was always the same; a compact pile of crushed bones, and within three or four yards, a complete skull, these with antlers. Then we found a fresh set, a kill of not later than the day before.

"That monster not only has a big mouth, but it must be fast," was Hedrick's comment. "It is no cinch to catch an antelope in an open place like this."

We examined the grass; there were two distinct trails, one down from the top of the hill, the other up. The up-trail, oddly enough showed the signs of the drag behind it, the other not. There could be no mistake, the direction of the bent grass was conclusive. Outside the lines left by the wheels, we noticed many blades of grass tipped with droplets of a clear yellow liquid. As this golden dew appeared nowhere else, it must have dropped from the hubs of the chariot. Hedrick lifted a drop with a finger, held it under his nose, then gingerly tasted it.

"Crude castor oil," he grunted.

We followed the trails to the summit of the hill, where we found a long, nearly level ridge, marked occasionally by clumps of trees resembling mesquite. Up here there were many marks in the grass, as if a num-

ber of the vehicles had paraded up and down, and we observed half a dozen places where trails led straight downward.

Following the trails along the summit, we had just passed a clump of bushy trees, when we wheeled at the sound of a stifled scream from Itai.

Ten yards away a face was looking at us.

It was no human face—only grotesquely humanoid—and gigantic. Maybe it was four feet across, with large, dark, lustrous eyes gazing placidly at us. Between them a long nose, flexible as a trunk, twitched, and below grinned a yard-wide mouth, as full of teeth as a shark's. At each temple clustered what appeared to be curls, and two more clumps showed on top of the head. I was stupid with amazement and horror. I remember thinking that I used to know a barber who looked something like that.

But more ghastly still was the body. It was mounted on wheels, that attached to either side of a plumpness like a sort of owl. There were no arms or legs, only a dragonlike tail that swept behind to steady the bulk. The wheels were pale and solid, like the wooden ones on a Cuban ox-cart.

All that we saw in a flash of time. For at once the curl-pads on the monster's head unwound and flicked at us—four darting cables in the air. Itai was closest, and those devil's antennae whipped around his neck, arms and legs, yanking him through the air like a toy on a string. He screamed—once—and then the mouth received him, feet-first, and closed. His head dropped off, neatly severed, and bounced soddenly away.

Hedrick and I still stared. These large brown eyes closed as if in ecstasy. The thing began to chew, like a ruminant cow. Hedrick fired first, then I—bullet after bullet from our rifles, at point-blank range.

There was no effect. It chewed calmly. Lead bullets were like peas tossed at a sofa pillow—I saw momentary dimples as the missles struck and glanced off. That hide was tougher than armor. Its covering of glassy scales rang musically when hit.

We fired, perhaps two or three clips each, when the monster was satisfied with its snack. Opening its eyes and mouth, it spat onto the ground Itai's crumpled skeleton—then looked at us.

I had some saving instinctive impulse. Dropping my rifle, I swipped out my machete. Hedrick did likewise. The tentacles stretched toward us, more slowly—the thing wasn't quite so hungry now.

We whacked and slashed. My first stroke encountered a strand almost as tough as wire cable. A second blow, more strong and desperate, cut away an eight-foot length, and bright blood flowed. Hedrick was tangled in two of the antennae, lifting him from the ground as he hacked and hewed.

I rushed, swinging with all my strength, and he fell free. The monster gave a soul-shattering howl, and its eyes crinkled shut in pain, huge tears rolling into sight. Three of its four tentacles had been wounded, and fell back into coils that spurted blood. Still screaming, the creature threshed itself about with a sweep of its tail and pushed away. I saw prismatic lights on the scales of the back armor.

We pursued the Garzus—we knew that this must be one—and, scientists even in this hour of peril and fear, we saw that it moved by shoving stubby shoulders against spokelike ribs on the inner faces of the horny wheels. When we came close, we encountered another weapon. The back scales lifted, like hair on an angry cat, and from beneath white smoke gushed upon us. At the same moment the thing hoisted its tail, balancing on its wheels, and coasted away down a swift slope, losing itself behind the clouds of vapor.

It had laid a smoke-screen of silicon tetrachloride.

V

IT WAS with decidedly mixed feelings that we turned back to the spot where we had commenced our fight. But for the accident of position, either one of us might have played the role of Itai, and had the animal been less sluggish after its meal, it would have taken a second victim. The Thing was immune to gunfire, and with its four tough tentacles one man could not withstand it, even if fore-warned. He could only hope to wound it on his way into that hopper of a mouth.

Knowing now the secret of its locomotion, we perceived that the safest place to encoun-

ter one would be on level ground. It could hardly move faster than a brisk trot unless rolling free. We shuddered to think what our fate would have been if our party had been charged by a group of them while still on the hillside, for we now understood the technique of the beast's hunting. Yet even on flat ground, the ability suddenly to flick those forty-foot tentacles made them formidable foes. Yet, the Things must have some weakness; we knew we must study them and find a way to conquer.

The pieces of the antennae stank of silicr-ethane and we observed that they were really thick-walled gelatinous tubes. Just what was the function of the wire-thin inner duct that terminated in a sort of nozzle at the tip of the tentacle we could not fathom.

We had a brief discussion, and decided to go on to the quarry and begin our observation. Later we would come back and bury the remains of the unfortunate Itai. We scoured the ridge to make sure there was not another lurking Garzus to swoop down on us after we had begun the descent. Off to the west, the smoke-screen had almost dissipated. Our recent adversary had turned away to the south, several miles upstream from the ford and the quarry.

We found the quarry exactly as we had left it. Sixty feet or so overhead was a hard stratum of sandstone forming a ledge above which we could see the dark mouths of several caves. By grasping at the roots of shrubs growing out from the face of the cliff and taking advantages of the many minor projections we climbed without difficulty to the ledge. Directly under us was the quarry; to the left, beyond the creek, was the sand-bank where the Garzi paraded. We flattened down on our faces, and unslinging binoculars, began our vigil.

Nothing happened for several hours. Once we made out through our glasses another little tragedy on the hillside we had quit earlier. From the crest of the hill came a flash of light, something like a runaway cannon slid swiftly down to where an antelope was grazing, there was a quick gleaming of silvery lariats flailing the air—and there was no more antelope. In a little bit, the rolling thing turned and slowly climbed up the hill and disappeared into a clump of trees.

Intent on this drama, we had not noticed the first approach of a herd of Garzi. But soon there were dozens, slowly rolling up and down the sands, while some browsed in the patch of *Euphorbiaceae*, tearing at the branches of the bean bushes. Among them were many little ones, Garzilli we called them.

The larger Garzi seemed to be engaged in prodding the little ones into promenading, following them closely. Whenever one of the baby monsters would show a tendency to stop or even to slow down, the parent would whack it forward with a resounding side slap of the tail. Now and then an elder Garzus would appear to attack one of the little ones from the side, gripping it firmly with all four tentacles while nuzzling at the near wheel. The Garzillus would make the air hideous with its trumpeting and squealing for a moment, and, then released, it to roll wabblingly away, it's soft young wheels bending and caving under the infant's weight.

"Must be teaching 'em to roll!" whispered Hedrick.

In the meantime, several full-grown Garzi had forded the creek and were up in the quarry. We watched their operations with the most intense interest, for of all the clues we had previously found, those in this spot were the least intelligible.

From our excellent observation post we learned to distinguish between male and female. The latter were smaller, but the salient difference was in the snout. The female proboscis was much shorter and thicker, and terminated in a cup-shaped tip of bone or ivory. This tip appeared to be quite thin, even sharp, like a tin biscuit cutter.

WE COULD not see exactly what they were doing among the piles of silicates because usually their scaly backs and tails were to us, but we could see fumes rising and detect the odor of chlorine in the air. Just what acid or in what manner they secreted it, we shall probably never know, but having poured it out, they waited patiently. From our previous find, we were able to anticipate the result, they were preparing silicic acid. In a while we were to see them eat it, and others follow and repeat the performance.

Virtually prisoners until the hour should come when this herd would move on, Hedrick and I had ample opportunity to digest what we had seen. Finally, we withdrew a distance into the cool inner part of the cave and compared notes.

We were too realistic not to accept the natural explanation of it. After all, the human being consumes and converts in his lifetime a vast quantity of carbon, salt and other solids. There is small difference between a diet of diamonds and coal and a diet of opals and quartz. It is all a matter of glands and digestive processes.

The Garzus, from its observed diet and excretions, had an affinity for silicon. Its skin and the scales of its armor were siliciculous; it exhaled a silico-ethane, it could produce silicon tetrachloride for protection, and used a silicic acid in digestion. In order to ingest the required amount of the element, it had special glands that enabled it to reduce onyx and quartz to an edible jelly. It was all very reasonable. And it made us anxious to kill and dissect one of the things. Doubtless the more normal diet of animal flesh was to provide the necessary heat for movement and the operation of its internal laboratories.

Hedrick and I were in fair agreement as to these theories, but we still had the novel method of locomotion to consider. Nature is a great experimentalist, but this example verged on the incredible. I must have been a little dazed by the rapid events of the last two days, for I must admit that I owe the explanation of it to Hedrick's keen mind.

But I was to wait a while before receiving it. When we had finished our discussion of the silicic aspects of the Garzus, we went out onto the ledge to take a look. The herd had gone. They had gone through the castor plants, a few were still there browsing on the far edge, the others were slowly rolling toward the forest—toward where Dooling and Tuputu were awaiting us!

VI

WE SCRAMBLED down straight through the ravaged bean growth, crashing through the brittle bushes and acquiring many scratches. As we neared the far edge, we slowed down, and gripping our machetes and keeping a sharp lookout for the Garzi, but it was not until we had emerged on the other side that we saw any.

The sun was behind us, a circumstance that rendered the Garzi ahead of us exceptionally visible, for the rays reflected from their prismatic backs were brilliant and of every hue. There were three of the glittering creatures, their tails to us, at the foot of a tree by our camp site. We could see the flashes from the snaky feelers that were stripping the lower branches from the tree. We advanced boldly, knowing their clumsiness, but stopped about twenty yards behind them. There was no danger as long as we could stay out of reach of the tentacles, we felt that outside of their radius we could outrun the cumbersome creatures should they turn and threaten us. But they were too intent on what was before them to notice our approach.

A shout from above informed us that Dooling was high up in the tree. He was trying to warn us of the monsters, and said there were several more back in the woods. As he spoke, we saw two rolling toward us, one from directly behind the tree, the other from somewhat to the right of it. We ran to the highest of the nearby trees and scrambled up not a moment too soon, for before we were high enough to be out of reach, we each had to straddle a limb and slash frantically at sinuous glassine tentacles.

I did not succeed in doing more than nick the ones grasping for me, but Hedrick managed to cut away a yard or so of the tip of one, and we heard the yelp and howls of its injured owner with grim pleasure. We resumed our ascent until we came to a roomy fork about fifty feet from the ground. An excited chatter overhead reminded us that we had company. A group of the Capuchin monkeys was huddled there, squeaking and twittering in fright.

Firmly settled, we craned our necks hallooing, until we spotted a khaki patch through the lacery of leaves. That was Dooling perched in his tree, a couple of hundred feet away. After we had cut away some intervening branches so that we could see better, we observed that his tree was not so high as ours, and although he was at about our level, he could go no higher. He, too, had

partners in misery, a pair of monkeys like ours. Shouting back and forth, we gave each other the high spots of the day's happenings.

Dooling said that Camber had been there about noon with a good load of provisions. They had visited for a while, and Camber had gone back, saying he would return again tomorrow. Dooling went to work on our notebooks. His first intimation of danger was the warning given him about an hour before by the excited Tuputu.

They watched two Garzi approach, and he fell into the pardonable error of trying to shoot them. Ignorant of the uncanny peril in the innocuous looking curls on the heads of the monsters, he continued shooting until the first one got too close. Tuputu charged it with a machete, and Dooling saw him snatched and devoured in one horrible instant. Under the circumstances, he could think of nothing better than to climb the nearest tree.

We told him he done the only possible thing, but that he was safe now. And when we said it, we thought he was. We did not know that the Garzus had still another deadly weapon.

WE WATCHED the Garzi below us grope the lower branches of our tree with their tentacles, reaching, feeling for us, as if they did not trust their eyes. When we next glanced Dooling's way, we were startled to see that a ring of Garzi about the tree had extended their antennae to the fullest, all pointing at Dooling. They looked in the almost level rays of the setting sun like glistening glass rods. They failed to reach him by about ten feet, but the fumes we now saw jetting from their tips did not. Dooling shouted hoarsely something about deadly gas—chloroform—and frenziedly tried to climb. We saw him cling a moment to a little fork just above his head, then slip away and fall crashing. Like echoes, we heard the thuds of the monkeys as they plopped to the ground beside him. Helpless to do anything, we had to see the inert forms wrapped in tentacles fall as quickly as cut ropes and witness the greedy tug of war between two rival Garzi who had simultaneously clutched the body of our friend. We turned our eyes away, unable to endure more. When we had heard the third of the shocking *clops* of decapitating mouths snapped shut, we knew that Dooling was now in the maw of the "rolling death" of San Fernando.

Sick with horror, and despondent over our own futility, we hauled ourselves mechanically higher up the tree. Another twenty feet and we were among the shuddering monkeys.

Soon we had our gas attack. We caught the odor, but our height and a freshening breeze that had just sprung up made it ineffective. Seeing that we did not drop, the Garzi abandoned their posts below us and wheeled off into the forest.

In another hour, the bright beams of the rising full moon illuminated the savanna clearly. Hedrick placed a hand on my arm.

"Let's go down," he whispered, "there is at least one more thing we can try."

He led the way to the other tree, where the scattered remains of our advanced camp lay, rooted and tumbled around by the dragons. He picked up an armful of notebooks and asked me to do the same. Watching our tread carefully, for somewhere about here lay the heads of two of our fellows, we stalked out onto the moonlit plain.

"Damn the notebooks," Hedrick muttered, "if this hunch works, we can write a book whose dullest page will be worth a ton of this rubbish."

He led on. The breeze was quite strong now at our backs, as if blowing out of the moon behind us. Nowhere was the loom of a bulky Garzus. All about us was grass, and just ahead the shoulder high bushes of the castor bean area.

VII

"THANK God for the wind," said Hedrick, fervently. He tore branches from a bean plant and threw them to the ground. Ripping out a handful of leaves from the notebook he wadded them up. I struck a match and held it to the paper in cupped hands. Five minutes later, a roaring fire was sweeping away from us toward the cliffs. We ran each way along the edge of the plantation, lighting new fires every few dozen feet. In an hour's time we rejoined, and stood for a moment watching the wall of

flame as it swept toward the river. The crackling of bursting pods and stalks and the roar of the receding flame made a tremendous noise, but we did think once we heard the howling of a roasting Garzus.

We returned at once to our scattered camp. It was fairly light in here now, the moon beams coming through from one side and the ruddy glare of the burning bushes from the other. We rummaged about and found a ball of fish-line, and I mounted to our nest in the tree.

Once there, I let the line down, and successively drew up piece after piece of our outfit that Hedrick tied on below. As each item reached me, I would cut off a short length of the line and lash it to a convenient limb. It must have been midnight when Hedrick joined me.

We had boxes of food, six canteens of water, and some of Dooling's chemical gear and the first aid kit. We took our belts and rifle slings and rigged safety belts. We were all set for a siege. We could last in comfort for a week. But that night we could not sleep, there had been too many gruesome things happen before our eyes, and too much of interest. And the coming day was to have its responsibilities. We must warn Camber, for he would come walking along, innocent of the dangers that surrounded him.

Hedrick elaborated his theory of silicon absorption and recombination, and gave me his ideas on the rolling system of locomotion.

"Until we saw these things," he said, "we would have staked our professional reputations that a free joint, like between wheel and axle, would be an impossibility in a living thing. The limb cannot have a connection with the body, and therefore would wither from lack of nourishment. But here, all around us, are examples of this impossibility in actual being. Luckily, there is also the evidence which enables us to see *how*.

"The diet of castor beans serves a double purpose. It provides raw material for the glands of the Garzus which manufacture an organic oil that is both a lubricant and a carrier of living substance to replenish the wheels as they first grow, then wear away. As human body absorbs mercury or lead if rubbed on the skin, so do these horn wheels absorb food from the oil surrounding the axles.

"The females have a bony gadget at the tip of their noses. I am confident if we could find a nest of fresh born Garzilli we would find them with soft, flexible wheels of gristle, and without intervening joint. As they get older, the gristle turns to horn, becomes stiff enough to bear its weight, but the little thing cannot yet move about, it must remain motionless in the lair. This is when the mother brings her peculiar nose into play. *She cuts a joint.* By this time, the castor oil glands have begun functioning. The oil flows into the incision, soothing it, and thereafter acts as lubricant and carrier of building elements to the severed horn.

"Normally, the horn would again adhere to the axle, just as human bones tend to grow together after a serious joint injury. We can understand now the purpose of the relentless driving up and down of the little ones by the parents. You even saw on several occasions where a mother recut a joint that might have been beginning to freeze. By the time the Garzillus approaches full growth, it has worn definite bearing surfaces on both axle and wheel, its oil glands have taken over their duties, and the rolling joint ceases to require any more attention than our own elbows.

"But suppose we cut off that part of the food supply which provides the oil, like our burning the bean patch. If, as I hope, that is the only considerable supply near here, it is bound to have profound affects. I anticipate adhesions, perhaps complete immobilizations of the wheels. Stalled in their tracks, they cannot replenish their silicon supply, and the chemical exudations of which they are capable will probably diminish in strength. And, unless some other animal is so stupid as to stray within reach of the antennae, they will also lack the blood food they have been getting."

This logic seemed to me to be perfect. The one great question was, how long will it take? Snakes can endure months without food. Would we see this herd, its wheels locked, die all about us? Would it take a week, a month, how long?

Our discussions had used up the night. In the fuller light of the breaking day we

began to see the monsters rolling toward us, closing in on our tree trunk. They were coming back to finish their work of yesterday. Whatever the ultimate effect of the destruction of the castor plants, in the meantime we must find quicker acting weapons.

VIII

AS HASTILY as possible Hedrick prepared a neutralizer for the Garzus chloroform. We tore off our shirts, and were ready to wet them with the solution and bind them to our noses if attacked again.

"Camber is coming here about noon," Hedrick said, "and they will surely get him. We've got to get down and head him off."

I had been thinking of that, too. I felt I would as soon die myself as witness another friend gulped down. But there was so little we could do. Now that we knew about the gas, it would be suicidal to descend and try an attack with machetes.

Hedrich produced another beaker from Dooling's box.

"It doesn't cost anything to experiment," he remarked drily. "I am going to mix up a belly-ache for our little playmates. You be thinking of a way to feed it to them."

He went to work with his bottles, weighing stuff by guess. The bubbling, fizzy concoction looked potent. I wondered if the Garzi would snap up a bottle. Their craving for silica might lead them to. Then I remembered that they did not eat crystals raw, they first dissolved them into jelly. Our medicine must be fed to them some other way. That is when I thought of the poor monkeys. I dug in Dooling's box and found a big hypodermic syringe, and a can of chloroform.

Busy with compounding our prescription, we were not watching the Garzi, but at the first whiff of the threatening odor, we bound up our faces with the saturated shirts. The stupefying fumes rose steadily to us. A monkey passed out and fell straight down. Another, from just above, crumpled and started to slide by us but I grabbed the limp form and half jammed, half hung it in the crotch of a branch. The other monkeys were hanging desperately to the limbs, groggy, barely conscious. Pouring some chloroform onto a piece of shirt, I clambered around, putting first one monkey and then another completely out, securing them so that they could not fall. I got a grim comfort out of the condition in which I found them. They were doomed anyway; I could not be blamed too much for using them in the way I had planned. At least there was a promise of vengeance.

As fast as Hedrick could fill the syringe, I brought and held the limp animals until he shot the injection home. I piled the sagging forms around us as best I could on the limbs and branches about us. It took a long time to prepare eight, but eight we needed, one for each of our besiegers.

The gas had stopped before we were ready, but the Garzi were still there, staring up at us with those astonishing eyes.

"Let's go," I said, and began heaving the bodies down.

IT WAS a full ten minutes after the horrid churning before we knew that the gastric juices of the dragons had mingled with our doses. Unprepared for what followed, we almost fell from our perch. Before, we had heard the howls of injured Garzi, when we had hackled at their antennae, but those were as nothing compared to the hideous cacophony that arose now from below. The medley of shrieks, trumpeting, howls and bellowing nearly broke our ear-drums, while the threshing about of the agonized monsters made our tree tremble from its uttermost leaf to the very trunk. Slashing about below, the crystal encrusted tails beat wildly against their mates, against the tree, anything solid. In their frenzy and agony, the creatures' glands let go with every offensive and defensive device known to them. Gasses squirted from the drooping antennae and from beneath the hard, glittering scales of the back and tail came smoke, the cavernous mouth belched other gasses and vomited gobs of bloody jelly.

It was with grim, sardonic joy that we viewed this spectacle. If the extraordinary structure of the Things had allowed it, they would have wallowed and squirmed, but bound as they were by those colossal wheels, they could do nothing but yowl and thresh about, whipped here and there by the dragonish tails. The exudation of the smoke-screen, an instinctive reflex, quickly blotted

them from our vision. What followed we could only guess at, it was much too thick below.

"I figured they had acid stomachs," was Hedrick's bland comment.

After a bit, when the smoke had cleared somewhat, all we could see were a few smoky trails, leading away. If Hedrick's prescription had proved fatal, they had gone away to their hidden lairs to die. We left the remnants of our field laboratory and the food supplies that were in the upper branches. We climbed down, and machete in hand, took the back trail to the base camp.

We were halfway there when we met Camber. We turned him back and walked along beside him. He was inexpressibly shocked at what we told him, but we could see the gleam of disbelief in his eyes. He heard us out, but as we neared the base camp his revealing comment was:

"It's a tough country—a good night's sleep will do you both good."

We fell onto our cots like men struck by an axe.

WHEN we woke Camber felt that he ought to make the usual trip to the advance base. He still believed that Dooling and the two Indians were camped there. We reiterated our story in vain. He persisted in treating us as sick men, spoke of tropical fever and the like. Futilely, as it later transpired, we tried to impress him with the reality of the tragedy we had survived.

A couple of mornings afterward, when we got up for our breakfast, we found Camber gone. We selected the sharpest machetes in the camp and hastened after him. I need not tell you the rest. Six miles away we found the head and the thoroughly masticated bones. The incredulous, as well as the credulous, are sometimes led to fearful ful dooms.

The Garzi, then, still moved about their domain. We got our notes in order, and started to mix more of Hedrick's prescription, but had used up several ingredients. Because we must, we retreated into the thick forest through which we had first come, knowing that no wheels could follow us there.

Our natives were as nervous as when last we saw them. Perhaps they wondered what had become of our companions, but none deserted. At the end of a week, Hedrick and I scouted back into Garzus territory.

From the tree that once gave us refuge we surveyed the country beyond. Fire had swept away most of the castor beans. About two clumps that had survived thronged numerous Garzi, apparently fighting over the inadequate supply. We camped that night at the edge of the thick forest.

Next morning we saw none of the Garzi, and no castor beans at all. Venturing into the open, we spotted a grotesque shape standing motionless on the charred plain, and further on another. Approaching the nearest one, we found that it whipped its tail savagely and reached with its tentacles, but did not move on its wheels. We closed in, gingerly chopped off its tentacle-tips and pressed in to prune them as close as we could.

He could not turn those wheels—they were frozen. After experimental slashes, we sliced away some of his lifted scales. Finally, with repeated stabs in the exposed softness, we killed it amid weird and mournful howls.

An axe from the camp enabled us to strip away the tough bulk, until we had freed the axle-bone and wheels. While I finished the stripping of the axle, Hedrick, examining some of the exposed viscera, screamed.

I whirled to help him, but I staggered back, choking and momentarily blinded, from a cloud of vile yellow-green glass.

His machete had thrust into an organ, from which the venomous juice had squirted into his face. He was unrecognizeably disfigured by its deadly acid!

I LASHED his body to the axle-bone and from our belts and gun-slings rigged myself a harness. Then, dragging the chassis of the Garzus, I struck along the creek margin toward the falls. I passed stalled Garzi—singly, in groups, once a mother with three young—and with gloomy satisfaction knew that they must linger where they were, to starve for want of castor beans, quartz and blood food. One still roiled, very slowly, after me, but easily I distanced him and came to our base camp.

There stood perhaps a dozen Garzi, the last of their great race. Necessity had driven

them on creaking wheels into this country where for ages they had existed only in legend. About them lay the strewn wreckage of our camp—boxes, our valuable notes, instruments. Our canoes were crushed by the blind thrashings of the starved beasts. Up several trees hung some of our Indians, but scattered on the ground were many brown heads of crushed victims.

By now, none of the raiding Garzi could move freely. Casting off my harness, I approached, machete in hand. One after another I cut away the groping tentacles—twice I was nearly snared and eaten—and it was an afternoon's dreadful, exhausting work.

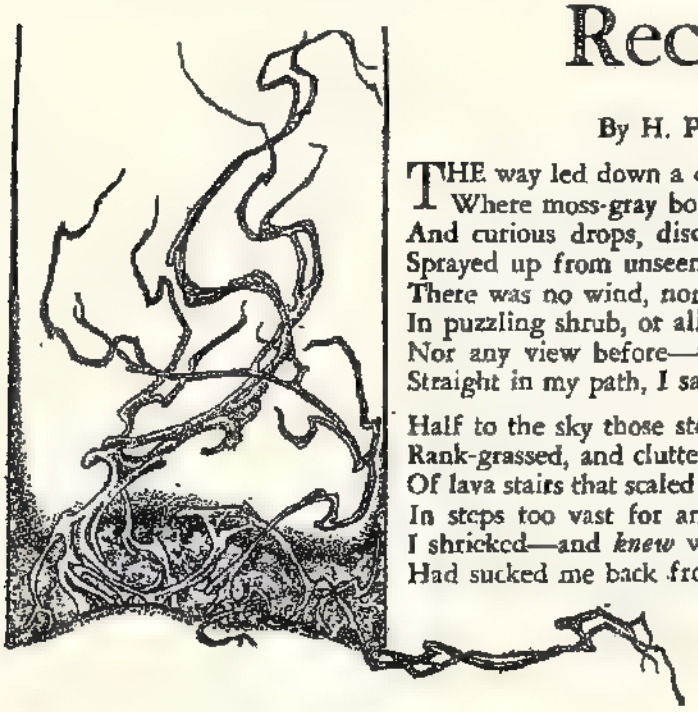
The surviving Indians watched me, and this conquest of demons before their eyes gave me the prestige with which I carried out the last phase of the adventure: I bullied them down from their perches, made them load a single unsmashed canoe with a few salvaged supplies and the specimens I had saved. The chassis of the Garzus could not go whole, and so I hewed away the wheels, saving only the axle-bone.

The trip down-river to the mission lasted a week. When the Indians, still *horrified*, tried to desert me and my relics of their dreaded demon-enemies, I kept them at the paddles with a levelled pistol. And I reached here, and then the cumulation of horror, fatigue and perhaps sickness brought on by that whiff of acid-gas, blacked out everything.

* * * * *

That is the end of Taussig's narrative. He came home with us aboard the *Tethys*. How that heavy axle-bone came to be broken is one of the mysteries—both Taussig and I think that the Indians who handled it deliberately chopped it up as a magical rite. Anyway, his story did not suit those who heard it at home. The Garzus remains unrecorded among the fauna of the upper Amazon, but it may be that in the future some man of daring and faith will go into the Caquini country and find those telltale remains.

But before he goes, let him come to me. I know where Taussig lives today—he runs a taxidermist's shop on Ninth Avenue, and refuses even to discuss the affair save with me, to whom he thinks he owes much. Perhaps I can persuade him to show the model of a Garzus which stands hidden on a closet shelf in the back of his shop. Even though small and stationary, it is frightful enough to be convincing.

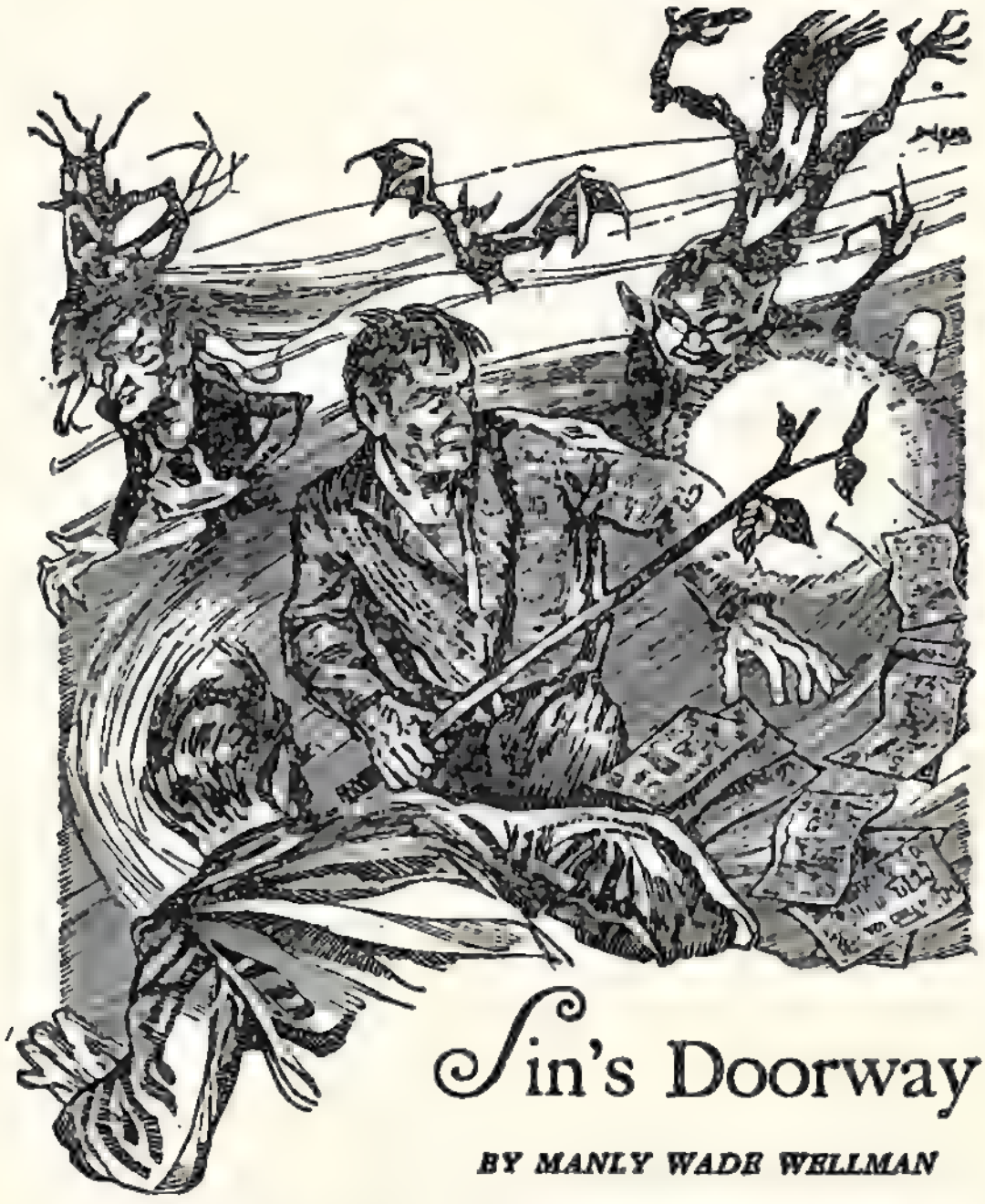


Recapture

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

THE way led down a dark, half-wooded heath
Where moss-gray boulders humped above the mould,
And curious drops, disquieting and cold,
Sprayed up from unseen streams in gulfs beneath.
There was no wind, nor any trace of sound
In puzzling shrub, or alien-featured tree,
Nor any view before—till suddenly,
Straight in my path, I saw a monstrous mound.

Half to the sky those steep sides loomed upspread,
Rank-grassed, and cluttered by a crumpling flight
Of lava stairs that scaled the fear-topped height
In steps too vast for any human tread.
I shrieked—and *knew* what primal star and year
Had sucked me back from man's dream-transient sphere!



Sin's Doorway

BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN

. . . and sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

—GENESIS, IV, 7.

IN THOSE DAYS and in that part of the South I tried to keep out of county seats and other towns of any size. Sheriffs and town marshals had a way of rounding up tattered strangers and putting them on chain gangs. That spring I followed a trail, not much more than a footway, between two hills where the live-oaks and the long leaf pine shouldered themselves into thickets. There would be clearings in the hollows beyond, and a cabin or two of simple people. They'd recognize me, I hoped, for someone sad and hungry. I'd be invited to eat corn bread—

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

fried bacon too, if I was lucky, or a stew of squirrel or rabbit. I had not eaten since the morning before, nor very heartily then. Feeling faint, I knelt to drink from a little pencil-wide stream. When I rose, my legs were not so shaky.

Then as I tramped downhill between the path's scrub-grown borders, I heard voices singing an old hymn. Around the bend I walked, and came almost among the people.

There were twenty or twenty-five of them, overalled men, and women in homespun dresses and calico sunbonnets, and some shock-headed children. They stood bunched in front of a shabby little clapboard church, —I knew it was a church by the tacked-on steeple that housed no bell. Next the church was a grassy burying-ground, with ant-eaten wooden headboards, fenced by stakes and rails. Nobody stood inside the fence. They all faced toward a home-made coffin of whip-sawed pine, rough and unpainted.

I hate funerals. I go to as few as I can manage. But I paused to watch this one. Nobody looked sorry or glad, only intent. Beside the coffin stood a tall mountainy man in worn black, with a grizzled chin-tuft that lengthened his hawk-like face. Perhaps Abe Lincoln would have looked like that, if Wilkes Booth had spared him for twenty more years. That was the preacher, I decided, for as the singing died he began to talk. As my eyes turned toward him, I saw two figures squatting on the ground beyond him and the coffin. For a moment I took these to be old carven images, like figure-

" . . . assume and take to thyself the sins that trouble the soul of the departed."

heads from ancient sailing vessels. They looked weathered and colorless, face, hair and clothing. One was a bewhiskered male, the other a wrinkled old female. Neither moved, not even their eyes blinked. But their backs were tense, as though slighting the church. I know Southern folklore, and remembered a bit; witches, the servants of devils, always turn their backs to the house of God.

"It was the will and prayer of Levi Brett, our departed—brother—"

The preacher had stumbled over that word as if he had disliked to speak it. "His will," he went on, "that we call at his burial for someone to eat his sins."

I pricked up my ears at that. Sin-eating—the old English had believed in it. There was something about it in *Precious Bane*, a delightful novel I hoped to read again if ever I came among books, and had money to buy them. For pay or for gratitude, a living person assumes the burden of sin borne by a dead one. Then a soul is free to enter heaven, and the sin-eater has years of life in which to expiate that assumed obligation. Once or twice I had heard rumors, just rumors, that some back-country Americans kept the custom.

The preacher paused again, watching his companions. Nobody stirred, except a couple who swayed a little back, as if they disliked the suggestion.

"Levi Brett gave me money as he died," said the preacher. He produced a wallet. "Here are one hundred dollars. That will go to the one who eats the sin. Also Levi Brett's house on Dravot Ridge."

A hundred dollars in cash must have seemed a fortune to those simple hill folk. A heavy-featured, wide-eyed young man started forward at mention of it. But when the preacher spoke of the house on Dravot Ridge, the young man stepped back among his companions. He shuddered, I think; or perhaps they all shuddered.

I moved toward them. The preacher looked at me. So did something else, that now I saw for the first time.

IT LAY prone by the coffin, brown and motionless. At first I thought it was a hound, then I thought it was not. It was hound-size, and lean like a hound; but its feet were all wrong, big and furry, and its low, close-drawn way of lying on its belly was more like a weasel. Its eyes did not falter as mine met them. I never saw a dog with ears like those, and the face, what I could see between the wide forepaws, was strange.

"Yes, brother?" the preacher said to me.

"Sir, you ask for a sin-eater," I ventured.

He held the wallet toward me. "A hundred dollars and a house," he repeated. "It is a fine house—so I hear tell."

"The dead man's a stranger?" I suggested.

"Not Levi Brett," mumbled a voice in the group. "Not enough of a stranger, anyhow."

I paused and thought, and tried to decide what sort of thing it was that lay and watched me, there beside the pine coffin. Then I looked back at the preacher. I licked my lips, but my dry tongue would not moisten them.

"I'll do it, if I'm allowed," was what I managed to say. Since I cannot explain how I began to be nervous and frightened so early in the matter, I shall not try. "I'll do it," I said again, more confidently.

"Praise the Lord," a deep-voiced man intoned, and "Amen!" said a shrill woman.

As I walked toward the coffin, the preacher stepped toward me and took my hand in his big, strong bony one. "Let me call a blessing on you now," he said. "Later, you may be glad of a blessing, brother." His eyes searched my face. "You are young, you have a look of light. I pray your soul won't suffer out of reason."

"But you're really concerned for the soul of the dead man," I reminded, and someone said "Amen!" I held out my hand. "Give me the money."

"First repeat," commanded the preacher. "I—and speak your name."

"Obediently I did so.

"Do freely," he prompted me," and before all living things in this world and the next, assume and take to myself the sins that trouble the soul of the departed Levi Brett."

I said it all, and wound up by swearing, as he urged, on a holy name. Then he handed me the wallet. It was simply cut and sewn, of some wonderfully soft dark leather. I opened it. Inside were ten ten-dollar bills, of the old large size.

"Levi Brett stands clear of evil," said the preacher to his little flock. "He may enter holy ground. The Lord's name be praised."

They burst into song, another old hymn, and six men moved forward to pick up the coffin by wooden cleats that served as handles.

The preacher led, and they carried it past the stake-and-rail fence into the cemetery where, I now saw, was a ready-dug grave. The hymn finished, and all watched.

From the wallet I took a bill. I spoke to the nearest onlooker, a tussock-bearded old man who looked like photographs of Ambrose Powell Hill.

"I'm hungry," I said. "Faint with hunger. I wonder if you would—"

"Take that double-damned money away," he snapped, and his eyes blazed above the hair on his face. "It's the devil's price for what you done. You're a man of sin, young fellow, purely rotting away with the sins of Levi Brett you eaten just now. I had nothing to do with him, and I'll have nothing to do with you."

I felt weaker than ever, and I began to plead. "Then, if you'll take no money, will you be kind enough to—"

A WOMAN came to the man's elbow. She must have been his wife, a tall, strong hill creature. "Young sir," she said, "I never hoped to turn away a hungry creature. But I can't give you food or comfort, less'n your sin may catch onto me. I daren't say more than I pity you. Go on somewhere, where they'll feed you unbeknownst of what you carry. That way, maybe, they'll not lose grace by you."

"Look," stammered a young girl, pointing. "Levi Brett's critter—"

The brown animal had risen from where it lay, on four legs that crooked strangely. It pointed a long nose at me, like a trained hunting dog that shows the prey to its master.

"You've taken Levi Brett's sin indeed," said the bearded man, and the glare in his eyes filmed over with terror. "That thing lived with him on Dravot Ridge, his only family. When he was took sick at the preacher's house, it came and camped under his window. It layed by his coffin—" He broke off and choked, then spat furiously. "Now it's yourn. Go—please go! Then it'll go with you!"

Everyone drew away from me, toward the fence. Beyond the rails, the coffin-carriers had lowered their burden into the grave, and three of them were spading earth upon it. I felt icy cold, and tried to lie to myself that it was the assault of hunger. I turned away.

Some children began to jabber a little cadenced sneer, to one of those universal childhood tunes:

"Your soul to the devil,

"Your soul to the devil,

"Your soul to the devil—devil—devil—"

After all, I resolutely said in my heart, they didn't mean that. Maybe this was originally an Irish community. I knew that Irishmen sometimes said "Your soul to the devil," for nothing but a joke. I turned and walked, to get away from staring, repelling eyes.

Beyond the clearing where stood the church and the burying-ground I could see trees, denser thickets than those among which I had walked so far. Two trails led into the depths of the timber, and I turned my steps toward one. Something sounded beside me, pit-pat, pit-pat—the brown animal had joined me. It had a long thin tail, and it seemed awkward on all fours, like a monkey. It looked up at me once, more eloquently than dog or cat could manage, and headed for the other trail-head. I went with it.

As the two of us entered the woods, along the dim green bough-roofed arcade that was the trail, I sagely decided where I had seen something like my companion. Charles R. Knight's paintings, as are to be seen in New York's Museum of Natural History, or in books like Scott's *History of Mammals in the Western Hemisphere*, include several things like that, particularly his restorations of the very early mammals of a million years ago and more. Such things, as I consider them, were developed amorphously, could be ancestors to the monkeys, the dogs, the cats, the hoofed beasts, or to all of these.

I DO NOT want to dwell too long on the specimen that now padded the trail with me. Its snout was long, almost raccoon-like, but its brow bulged in a way that suggested considerable brain volume to go with those

expressive eyes. Its forelegs had elbows, its rear legs had knees, and the feet that had seemed like big, hairy lumps bore long toes that could, if necessary, clutch like fingers. I wished it would go away, but did not care to shout or gesture at it.

When I heard human feet behind me, I was relieved, but for a single moment only.

THE two who had sat with their backs to the church were following me. As I glanced back, the man waved a skeleton-scrawny arm and the two broke into a run, uncouth but fast, to catch up. Both grinned, showing broken teeth.

"Let them scaty folk huddle together and die of the shivers," said the man, breathing hard with his exertions. "We'll see that you get food. Yop, and shelter. That is, we'll see you to your own proper house."

"You did a pure brave thing in taking the sins of Levi Brett," added his companion. "I always say, the young got courage and helpfulness."

I could feel nothing but gratitude in this proffer of help and friendship. In my hand I still carried the bill that I had taken from the wallet, and I held it out.

"Thank you, no," said the man, drawing away. "We're doing it for love," and he flashed his broken teeth in another grin. "You're one of us now."

"You mean, neighbors?" I asked, for I thought they might live on Dravot Ridge.

"Just one of us," said the woman. "Hasn't Parway taken you up?"

She meant the brown animal, which stood close to my side, faced toward them but with eyes ever upon me. So its name was Parway—I suppose that is how to spell it. A long moment its eyes held mine, then it turned and trotted ahead.

"Follow," said the man. "It will lead you home."

The three of us went along. I was glad for what I thought was human companionship. They chatted to me genially enough, asking my name and my home. I gave a false name, and said I had no home.

"You have now," said the old woman, and she and her companion blended their cackles, as at a delicious joke. I like that sort of rudeness as little as anyone, and I spoke sharply:

"You mean Levi Brett's house? The one on Dravot Ridge?"

"Well, yes." The old man made a drawl of it. "Only not exactly. It's yours now, by Levi Brett's spoken will. And it's not a house. It's a gardinel."

That word was strange to me. The world will be happiest if it remains strange to the world. I repeated it, rather stupidly: "Gardinel? What kind of a house is that?"

"A gardinel only looks like a house," the old man informed me, "and it can only be used like a house, by a few people. There's lots of gardinels, young fellow, in towns sometimes, and sometimes in off-way country places like this one."

"You ever walked along a street, and seen something like a house not built quite true, that seems to look at you with eyes instead of windows?" demanded the woman, blinking up at me. "Houses generally with nobody living in them, that everybody stays away from?"

Of course I had seen such houses. Everyone has. "Usually somebody tells me such a place is haunted," I replied.

"And usually it's no more than that," she rejoined. "But once in a while it's not a house, it's a gardinel."

THEY were having fun with me, or were they? . . . The beast named Parway had run ahead, and now it gambolled uncouthly at a bend of the trail some yards aheads. There was light, that meant a clearing of sorts. I walked toward it, and my companions followed at my heels.

The clearing was not large, and lofty trees grew thick around it. In its very center was exactly the sort of house I had been prepared for, with all that mocking mystery of the old man and the old woman.

I was never to decide what it was made of. Living wood, perhaps, hard and massive; of living rock, very living rock. On its solid walls were marks as of carving tools. Its two windows had sills that were of one piece with the house front, and the low-drawn roof, that was like a hat pulled down to the eyelike windows, was of a different color but seemed to be part of the same piece, too. The doorway had not been cut oblong, but irregular, rather like a cave-mouth, and all was dark inside. Parway padded up to

the threshold, looked back once to me, and darted in. At once a dim light went on, as if Parway had kindled it. My uneasiness was braced by angry mystification. Like the proverbial fool rushing in, I followed Parway.

"I save been waiting for you," said a deep, cultured voice, and there sat a human figure on a blocky stool.

The one was a man of indefinite age, with everything forked about him—his little divided beard, his joined and upslanted brows, his spiked moustache, hornlike points of hair at his brow. These things were probably makeup to a certain extent—Satan himself wouldn't have been so lavishly theatrical. The face was gaunt and mocking, with eyes as brilliant as Parway's; but to look intelligent, there would have to be more forehead. He held out a hand, which I had the instinct not to grasp. His gaunt figure was wrapped in a sort of gray gown.

"You'll be wondering," he said to me, "just what is expected of you."

"I do indeed," was my reply. "If you'll be good enough to tell me—"

"Tell me first," he said gently, "how much you know."

I cleared my throat, and wished for a drink of water. "I came to where they were burying someone called Levi Brett. It seemed he couldn't go into a proper grave until someone, by the old custom, assumed his sins. I did so, because I was poor and hungry, and there was a sum of money offered. Levi Brett's sins must have been considerable, because nobody wanted anything to do with me. And I let myself be led here, simply because it seemed easier than to go somewhere else. That's the sum of my knowledge to date, and I'd like to know more."

"Ah," said the man with the forked beard, "you deserve to know more, for the sake of the important things you're to do."

I TOOK time to look at other things than his face. The inside of the house was not properly angled. Walls curved, and junctures at ceiling and floor seemed blunt. There were beams and rafters interestingly tacked on, like ribs enclosing the body cavity of a disembowelled carcass. Beside the stool on which my new acquaintance sat there was only a desk, covered with papers. In a corner Parway had slumped down into that strange prone position of rest, eyes glued to me. I had a sense of growing disgust, as though I smelled something rotten.

"Permit me," said the man with the forked beard, "my name is Dravot, of the family for which Dravot Ridge is called. And you?"

I gave him the name I had invented for the unsavory couple outside in the clearing. He nodded.

"Let me be simple, though I doubt if the situation can ever be simplified enough to be explained in ordinary words. Levi Brett was—shall we say—brilliantly unusual? Or unusually brilliant? He knew many things, of the sort that weaklings of the ordinary world call forbidden or horrific. This dwelling is the repository of much knowledge. I know relatively little, for I was only his—well, his secretary, his aide. And the two outside are, frankly, stupid underlings. But let us not belittle their courage in accepting Levi Brett's acquaintance and leadership."

"You promised to be simple, and you're not," said I. "Was Levi Brett some sort of sorcerer or wizard? Is that why the people at the church hated his sin?"

"That is exactly the explanation that will do for the moment," smiled Dravot, as if in applause. "You will know better and better, as if dimensions are added to your mind. You have gifts, I daresay, that he lacked. You will carry on what he strove for, the bringing of people hereabout to our way of interesting truth."

I HAD actually forgotten my hunger. About me was a close warmth, a sweaty smell that seemed to go with the carcass-cavity form of the apartment. "I take it that Levi Brett did not make many converts to your beliefs," I said.

"It was deliberately that he set up in this community," said Dravot. "Knowledge that supernatural powers exist is part of the Southern hill culture. But with that knowledge goes fear. For many years Levi Brett did his wonders, and he attracted only me and the two out there. We know what power is possible, but the others refuse to know or even to surmise. They hated him. And even I—a native, of a respected family—haven't dared go among them for years."

"Levi Brett turned against all these things you tell about," I said suddenly. "He died

at the preacher's, and left money to buy someone to take over his sins."

There was a sudden storm of cackling laughter from outside, where the old couple were listening. Dravot laughed, too, and pointed his finger.

"Ah, ah, ah," he said, "that took in the fools, but I thought you'd see. Must I explain that, too?"

"You must," I told him, "and seriously. I don't like to be laughed at, Mr. Dravot."

"Forgive me, then. We'll be good friends later. But to explain: Levi Brett knew he must die. He hoped for a son to inherit his knowledge and work, but, for many decisive reasons, he never fathered one. He only pretended to repent—he sought out the preacher deliberately when he felt his last hours upon him. That old ceremony of sin-eating made you his heir, my young friend. You take over his possessions, his knowledge, his work. Good fortune to you."

I gazed at him, uncomprehending. He waved his hand at the papers on the desk.

"Some of these things you may read, but not all. Paper wouldn't contain them. The knowledge, I say, is in this house. Sleep here, dream here. Levi Brett's knowledge will grow within you."

I shook my head. "This has gone far enough," I said. "I dislike practical jokes. For you, as I see it, there is only one way to teach you manners."

Stepping forward, I lifted my fist. I was going to hit him.

HE DID not move, but Parway did. The lithe, strangely made body swooped in front of me. The long jaws opened, and triangular teeth, lead-colored and toxic-seeming, grinned at me. I stopped, dead, staring.

"Parway disagrees," said Dravot. "Meanwhile, if you think this is all a joke, how do you explain Parway?"

"Some sort of freak or hybrid," I said lamely.

Parway glared, and Dravot chuckled.

"He understands. He is not complimented, and I don't blame him. Parway has an interesting origin—you'll have read of such things, perhaps. Old demonologists called them familiars."

I had heard the word. Strange entities, given as companions and partners in evil to such persons as contracted to serve hell . . . but nobody had imagined anything like Parway.

"Suppose you think these things over," Dravot went on, rather patiently. "I'll leave you. It's evening. I wish you joy, young sir, of your first night in your new quarters."

He got up and strode away. The two outside followed him from the clearing. Light was dying there, but strengthened inside. I saw its source, a great candle in a wall bracket, a candle black as tar that burned with a strong white light like carbide.

My early faintness returned to me, and I sat on the stool. If I could but have some food. . . .

And there it was, on the desk at my elbow.

Parway looked from me to the well-filled tray. Had he brought it from somewhere? I could not see clearly at first, then stared. One steaming dish held a sort of pilaffe. Another cutlets half-hidden in savory sauce. There was a crusty loaf with fruits baked into it, a massy goblet of yellow metal that held dark liquor. In a deep bowl nestled fruits I did not know, but their colors were vivid and they gave off a delicious odor.

I started to reach for the tray, and paused, for my hand trembled so violently. That was when something—somewhere—betrayed its eagerness clumsily.

For the tray edged toward me on the table, as if it crawled on slow, tiny legs.

I sprang up, sick and dizzy with startled fear. The movement of the tray ceased abruptly, but I had seen. I would not have touched the food then, not though final starvation was upon me. I kicked out at the desk and overset it, tray and all.

The tray vanished, and the dishes, before they struck the flat, dull, solid floor. Parway looked at me bitterly, then reproachfully, and slunk to a corner. I sank back on my stool, wondering furiously.

That feast that had come at my mind's silent bidding, had vanished when I rejected it—there was precedent for such things in the history, or pretended history, of magic. Did not the witches gorge themselves luxuriously at their meetings, which the scholars call sabbats? Was not such gorging a kind of infernal sacrament, which bound the eater

to his nasty worship? I congratulated myself on my refusal.

For now I was believing the things that had been told me.

THE NIGHT that closed in would be chill, I knew, but inside the room the air grew warmer, if anything, and closer. Parway, still crouched in the corner, gazed at me expectantly. I hated that steady stare, direct but not honest. Turning my head, I saw the papers spilled from the overturned desk. Stooping, I lifted one.

The first word my glance caught was "gardinel," and at once I began to read with deepest interest:

"They may be small or large, conventional-seeming or individual, according to the words said and the help asked. Choose the place where one will grow, mark the ground plan, scatter the meal of the proper plant, and say—"

There was considerably more, but I would do humanity a disservice to write it here, even if I remembered correctly. Suffice it to say that it spoke of houses, or things like houses, being rapidly grown from nothingness like a sort of fungus. I remembered what I had heard earlier on the trail to Levi Brett's lair, the words of the old man: *"A gardinel only looks like a house, and it can only be used like a house, by a few people.* Was I to be one of such people? Had my declaration that I assumed Levi Brett's sins made me a creature of sorcery, whether I wanted it or not?

"I won't have this," I said. "I'm going."

Rising, I started for the door, but again Parway moved before me. His teeth bared, he crouched low on his rear haunches and lifted his forelimbs. His paws spread their toes, like clumsy hands to strike or grasp, and I could not find the resolution to attack him.

"What do you want?" I demanded, as if he would understand. And he did understand, and pointed with a paw, to the scattered papers. One blew toward me, or I thought it blew. Perhaps it crept of itself. I did not touch it, but bent to read the writing:

"Prepare the mind to receive knowledge. Empty yourself of your own thoughts. Then—"

My eyes read those words, and in the same moment my ears heard them—whether from without or within, how shall I say now? It's all very well to accuse me of hysterical imagination; but if it's easy to be cool and analytical in such a crisis, try it yourself some time. What I do remember well is the script on the page, crabbed but clear and black, and the quality of the speaking, deep and harsh and metallic, like the voice you would expect from Frankenstein's monster.

I straightened up and turned away, muttering a curse. Probably I should have spoken a prayer instead. Empty myself of my thoughts—and what would take their place? The thoughts of another, the things Levi Brett had known, thoughts which still crowded, bodyless, in this awful room and waited for a mind into which to slide themselves. Then I'd be Levi Brett.

I DID not want to be Levi Brett. I did not want the knowledge with which his thoughts were freighted. Anyone, even a skeptic, could see how fatal that would be. "You take over his possessions, his knowledge, his work." Dravot had told me that. I would live in this house that wasn't a house, eat foods of which I knew not the name that came from I knew not where. My companions would be Dravot, Parway, one or two of the God-forgotten among the natives. I wanted no such legacy. How to reject it, and remain what I had been, a starved and wretched wanderer?

The food, I remembered, had vanished. That was because I had refused it. Perhaps I had a clue to the procedure. I turned toward Parway.

"Go away," I commanded. "Go away, and let this house—what they call a gardinel—go, too. And everything else. I reject it."

Parway showed his teeth. This time he smiled, worse than any human being could manage. He laughed, too—no, someone outside laughed. Dravot was lounging just outside the door.

"Show grace," he bade me, tauntingly. "You can't turn back from us now. Accept. How else can we have you for our chief?"

"I'm no chief of yours," I said. "I refuse to be."

"Too late." He pronounced the words

with a satisfaction that was downright smug. "You can't give back what you've taken. From now on you'll live here, think here, work here. Open your mind, and cease to be a fool."

From the darkness beyond him came a patter of voices. The disgusting old couple had come back with Dravot, and they prayed. I'd rather not repeat the prayer, or the names it invoked. I put my hands over my ears.

"I'll not listen!" I shouted. "Let me out of here!"

Jumping to the threshold, I struck at Dravot. He bobbed easily out of danger, and I started into the open after him. At the same time something clawed and clutched at me from behind—the paw of Parway. It scrabbled and wriggled like a knot of gnawing worms, indescribably filthy. Then, I thank heaven, my ragged old jacket tore in the grasp he fastened upon it, and a moment later I was out in the clearing.

I wanted to run, but I knew I must not. I could not endure another seizure from behind. Anyway, the horrid old man and woman stood at the head of the one lane through the thick-grown trees. Abruptly I threw off the remains of the torn jacket and kicked them aside. With both hands I caught a stub of dead branch and wrenched it free from its parent stem. I poised it like a club. There was a strange flowing into me of resolution and rightness.

"Come on now," I challenged Dravot. "I'll flail the grin off of your face. Bring those two swine with you, and Parway if he dares. I'll fight you all four."

But they did not come. They stood where they were—Dravot nearest, the two oldsters by the trail-head, Parway squatting uncouthly in the lighted doorway. Their four pairs of eyes gazed at me, glowing greenly, like the eyes of frightened flesh-eating animals.

"You're not being fair," Dravot stammered, and I found the strength to laugh at that.

"Fair!" I echoed. "Fair, after you tried to trick me into this deviltry?" I lifted the stick. I felt strong.

"He did it," mouthed the old man beyond Dravot. "Chance, or some butt-in power from somewheres—he grabbed a hazelnut branch!"

"But we called lightning to blast it dead!" quavered the voice of the old woman.

"It stood because, dead or not, we couldn't touch it," Dravot flung at them. "Shut your mouths, or he'll guess."

I HAD guessed. Hazelnut, I had armed myself with hazelnut, a tree of force against ill magic. What says Albertus Magnus? I've looked it up since, and found it in his writings, not once but in many places. *Cut a hazelnut stick, and therewith strike the witch or wicked being* , something like that. . .

"You're all dirt," I raged at them, "and I'll plant hazelnut over any of you that dares face me."

Dravot had sidled forward, but kept out of reach of my stick. His foot gingerly touched my torn jacket, kicked it toward me. "It's yours," he said. "Take it back."

"Let it lie," I replied, wondering why he insisted on such a thing at such a moment.

"Take it back," he repeated, and lifted the rags on his toe. For an instant light from the doorway picked out something, the dark wallet of Levi Brett that protruded halfway from a pocket.

"I won't," I snapped. "That money is one of the things I want to give back."

"He knows!" squealed the old woman, and the old man slapped his skinny hand over her mouth. Dravot cursed her in words that made my scalp tingle. With a kick of his foot, he threw the jacket at me. It soared like a tatter-winged bat.

I struck at it with my club. It caught on the end and flapped there for a moment, then went sailing back, full into Dravot's face.

He screamed, as shrilly as the old woman could have managed, and pawed at the fabric with his hands. It had wrapped itself around his face like a net. I heard his muffled pleading that someone set him free, but nobody moved. The old man and woman had run away up the trail, and Parway drew back inside the house-thing. I stepped close to Dravot and began to beat him.

"Why didn't you take the money, if taking it meant such great power?" I yelled as my stick thumped on his swaddled head.

"You were afraid—or what? Things too evil for you?"

He tried blindly to defend himself. His outflung hand once grasped my stick; but he let go at once, with a howl as though electric current had run through him.

"Parway! Parway!" he cried, and Parway emitted the one sound I heard from him in all the incident. It was like a sound, human in quality but wordless. Dravot, still pawing at the clinging coat around his face and head, turned and stumbled in the direction from which Parway's voice had come.

"I rejected that money," I called after him, "and it has fastened on you. Now you can't let it go. Suffer from your own sins and those of Levi Brett!"

As Dravot reached the threshold, Parway ran from him, back inside. I saw him as he lurched against the wall, and he jarred the great black candle from its bracket. Dravot stumbled blindly, sprawled through the door, and lay still there. He must have fainted.

THE candle no more than struck the floor when flames burst and bloomed like flowers from a stage magician's trick rose-tree. Something in the construction or material fed those flames like suet. They sprang and spread everywhere. Parway, cut off by them from the one exit, scrambled back into a corner that would not long remain unkindled. Dravot lay, still motionless, even when tongues of fire lapped eagerly across him. The fire was dark, giving off oily wisps of smoke. I retreated, toward the lane up which the old couple had run away.

I departed, feeling my path in the dark with the hazelnut stick. I tried to rationalize, even though the matter was not rational.

Everything had centered around Levi Brett's bribe-money, which had doomed me when I accepted, which freed me when I thrust it away. The evil had been desperate when Dravot, as unprepared as I, came in contact. It had fastened upon him like a snake.

What now happened to him, in the heart of the burning, meant that I was spared the curse. I groped along as swiftly as I could. After moments, I heard a noise, a long quavering whoop or wail—not Parway, certainly not Dravot. The house, the thing called a gardinel—if it lived, could it feel? If it felt, could it scream its pain of fire?

I made myself run. I kept running until I was beyond earshot. Then I slowed to a walk again.

My weakness and hunger returned, and I had to brace my spirit to endure them. I must keep going until morning. By then I might have come to some other district among the hills, where nobody would guess that for an hour I had been in the grip of cursed magic. People would see me for a starved stranger, and offer me something to eat.

WEIRD TALES *for MARCH*

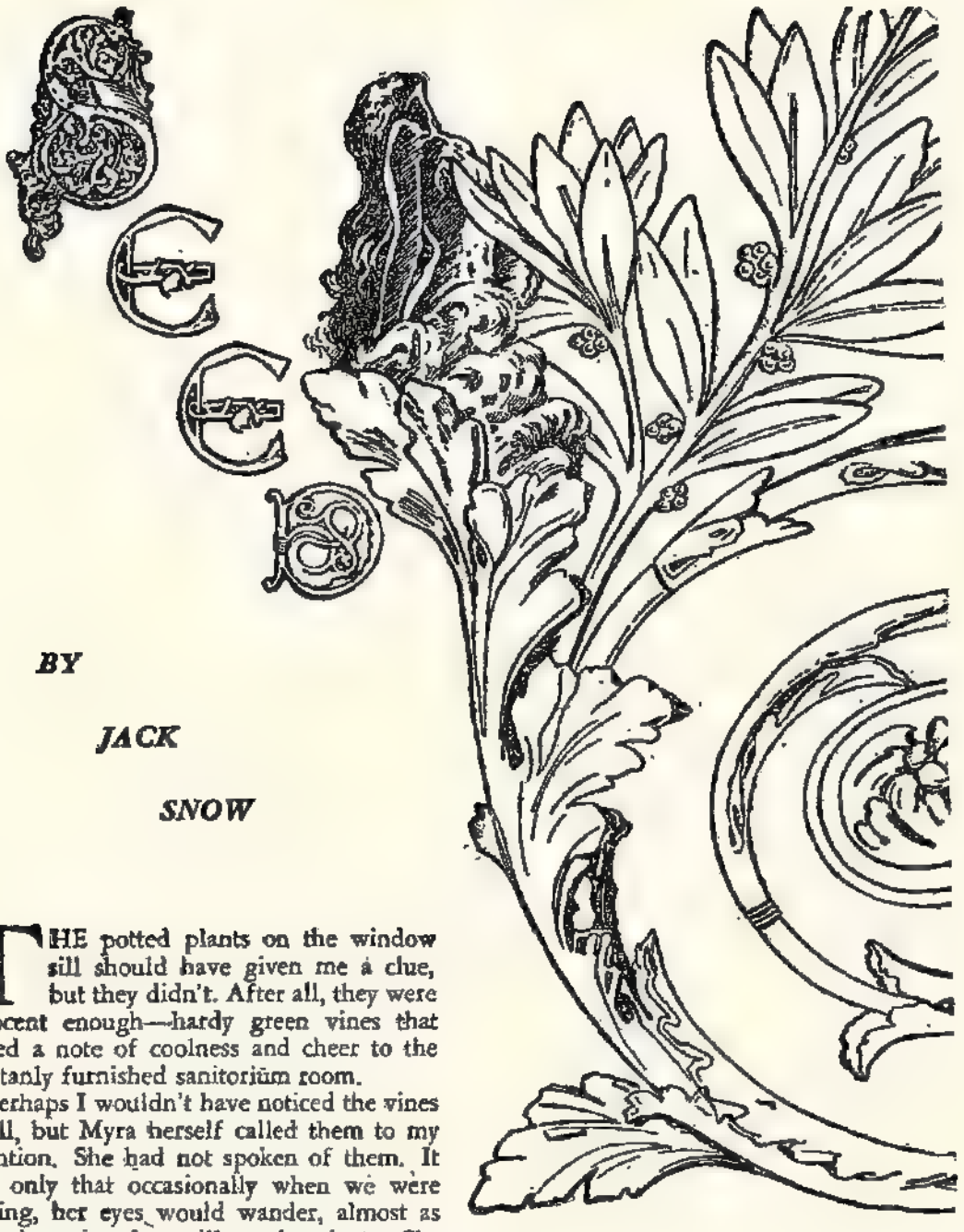
JIM KJELGAARD **RAY BRADBURY**

ALLISON V. HARDING

ROBERT BLOCH

and other w-e-i-r-d fiction favorites

Out January First



BY

JACK

SNOW

THE potted plants on the window sill should have given me a clue, but they didn't. After all, they were innocent enough—hardy green vines that added a note of coolness and cheer to the spartanly furnished sanitorium room.

Perhaps I wouldn't have noticed the vines at all, but Myra herself called them to my attention. She had not spoken of them. It was only that occasionally when we were talking, her eyes would wander, almost as though against her will, to the plants. She would stare with peculiar intentness at the vines for a few seconds, and then turn away with an effort. Once I thought I detected a shudder as Myra seemed particularly engrossed in the vines. I meant to ask her if the plants annoyed her and she wished them removed from the room, but at that moment she had started a train of conversation that had banished the odd little incident from my mind for the time. Upon recalling it later, I

A doctor must first know the disease before he can prescribe treatment—and where in the world was there an illness like this?

decided that Myra's preoccupation with the window plants could have no possible relation to her illness, and if she wished the vines removed, she had only to speak to Nurse Wilkins.

I hadn't known Myra was returning to this country until that evening in middle-May, when, upon entering my home, hot and weary after a stiflingly hot day filled with the round of calls that are the lot of a doctor in a small suburban town, my good housekeeper handed me a note. It was from Myra, stating simply that she had taken a suite of rooms in a fashionable rest sanitorium in the nearby city, and wished me to call on her that night.

Myra Bradshaw in a rest sanitorium! To say that I was surprised is putting it mildly. Anyone who has read either the Sunday magazine supplements or the scholarly journals of scientific societies will readily recall Myra Bradshaw—beautiful and world-renowned as the famous woman African explorer.

Her exploits were sensational enough to make her a natural subject for the big-circulation, luridly illustrated Sunday magazine sections, while her keenly intelligent monographs on archeology, anthropology and natural history had won her acclaim and respect in that comparatively small circle of men and women who subscribe to the reputable journals of geographic and scientific societies.

Myra Bradshaw was a woman of dynamic spirit and energy—a woman who had dared a thousand perils, faced a hundred jungle dangers and had exposed herself to a score of dread tropical diseases—and had never been ill a day in her life! This I had long marveled at from a professional standpoint, for it was my interest in archeology and the fact that our families had been friendly for many years that had drawn Myra and me together, not my profession. Indeed, Myra had more than once sniffed that she had as little faith in modern MD's as in African witch doctors!

Nevertheless, I concluded, Myra's latest African trek had proved too much even for her, and she had been forced to retire to the sanitorium for a rest. After a little reflection, I realized this was not too surprising. The years were taking their toll, that was all. Such adventures as Myra indulged in were for the young, and while Myra was by no means old, she was, I mentally calculated, closer to fifty than forty.

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

THE stars were gleaming with tropic brilliance, as I climbed into my car and drove the twenty miles to the city, after receiving Myra's message. In all my sixty odd years I can't recall a summer to equal the oppressive, unhealthful heat of that one which marked the reappearance of Myra Bradshaw in my life. The heat came early in May and remained with unslackened intensity late into September. Nor was it a summer of drought.

Most crops did unusually well for they were nourished with sunlight of furnace intensity and watered by frequent, sultry, torrential rains that soaked the steaming earth into a jungle-like morass. It was a season of rampant vegetable growth.

That night the heat was only slightly less than it had been at mid-day. In the reflected light of the moon, there seemed to be reflected something of the heat of the sun, from whose direct rays this little patch of earth had temporarily turned. The crickets, suffused with the abundance of heat and earthly moistures, filled the night with the din of their scraping. With a shudder I recalled reading somewhere that for every human being on the earth there are twelve million insects. Although the road was lonely, with almost no traffic, the night seemed suddenly crowded.

Nurse Wilkins, whom I knew from previous visits to the sanitorium, showed me the way to Myra's suite. I stopped short inside the doorway, finding it difficult to believe my eyes. Could this be Myra Bradshaw? The Myra Bradshaw I had known had been handsome and splendidly formed, radiating perfect health. The figure on the bed was that of a thin, gaunt woman, wasted and wan.

With an effort I endeavored to conceal the very real shock I had suffered. I moved toward the bed, stretching out my hand to clasp Myra's. Yes, it was Myra Bradshaw. Her eyes were unchanged, daring, inquisitive, beautiful, their deep hazel flecked with pure gold. They smiled at me now, and from the pale lips came an invitation to make myself comfortable in a chair near the bed.

Myra and I chatted for the better part of a quarter of an hour, but all the while another part of my mind was busily conjecturing. What had happened to my old friend? What had reduced her to her present pitiably weakened condition? Why had her hand been so icily cold when I had clasped it in greeting? Although the air of the room was constantly, though gently, circulated by several electric fans, and the three large windows were thrown open to the night, the room was stiflingly hot. Yet Myra's hand was cool—cool as—and I recall now with horror and loathing that the homely old simile ran through my mind—cool as a cucumber.

FINALLY, employing what I fondly believed to be clever conversational strategy, I steered our talk around to Myra and her sudden and wholly unexpected appearance in the sanitorium. Myra laughed, her eyes twinkling with some of their old merriment. "You old faker, you! I know you've been dying to ask me what I'm doing here, and what's wrong with me to put me in a state like this—flat on my back and weak as a cat!"

I admitted I was.

"Well," replied Myra more soberly, "I'm here as a last resort. But I don't want to tell you anything until you have made a complete physical examination. Can you do that in the morning?"

I assured her I could arrange my morning schedule to take care of the examination.

Great as my curiosity was, Myra remained firm in her determination to discuss her condition no further that night. After a few more minutes I realized that any attempt to extract additional information from her was futile, so with a sigh I bade her goodnight, promising to see her at ten the next morning.

As I drove home through the heat of the night, noting the forked prongs of light that darted above the black treetops on the distant horizon, I wondered with mingled curiosity if cooling rain would make sleep enjoyable that night, and what the physical examination of Myra Bradshaw would reveal in the morning. By the time I reached home, it was quite late and the stupor of the heat, combined with the monotony of the night sounds, and the fatigue of the long day, oppressed me with an utter weariness so that I soon sank into a deep and dreamless sleep.

II

"I COULD'VE told you, Tom, that there is nothing organically wrong with me, but I knew you wouldn't be satisfied until you had made an examination."

It was shortly after noon the following day, and I had just completed my examination of Myra Bradshaw. Myra was right. I had to admit that my thorough check-up had revealed no trace of any disease, nor could I detect any serious organic impairment. I mopped the perspiration from my brow and sat down beside the bed.

"But Myra," I protested, "there must be something that brought you to your present state. Haven't you any idea—how did it start?"

The woman in the bed smiled at me. "Tom," she said, "if I told you what I suspect is wrong with me, you'd hurry me out of here into the nearest mental hospital. So I'm not going to tell you—not now. I will remain here under your care, and perhaps you will be able to help me. I may be wrong, you know, and I wouldn't want you poking fun at me for the rest of my life, if I told you my suspicions—and then disproved them by recovering!"

I didn't press Myra to tell me what was on her mind. I knew she would confide in me, if she believed her story would be of any aid in treating her. And too, I had some idea how full the jungle is of superstition, and I supposed that not even a woman of Myra's fine intelligence could entirely escape being touched by it after spending years in the African wilderness. So I forgot whatever jungle jargon Myra might be harboring in her mind, and concentrated on restoring her health by modern medical science.

The two weeks that followed were ones of continuing intense heat and increasing worry and frustration for me. Nothing that I did helped Myra in the slightest. I visited her daily, and was forced to watch her waste away visibly before my eyes. I consulted with the foremost specialists in America. I investigated, probed and experimented. I forced and ultimately discarded theory after theory. I spent long hours after midnight reading in the sultry, night heat of my library, hoping that in my books I would find some clue that would start me on the right trail to solving the riddle of Myra's steadily weakening condition. As the days lengthened into weeks, I was forced to admit I was beaten. In despair I realized that a doctor must first have a disease, before he can prescribe a treatment. I couldn't find any disease. The only enemy I had to combat was Myra's extreme weakness, which increased progressively and was obviously induced by her apparent inability to derive nourishment from food. I prepared for her every known variety of energy extract, food concentrate and vitamin-mineral compound, but it was of no avail. My patient ate and drank regularly but for all the good the food did her she might have been on a starvation diet. I was forced to the unscientific conclusion that in some weird, inexplicable manner Myra Bradshaw was being robbed of blood as fast as her food was turned into the life-giving fluid.

The case baffled me completely. It was unreal and nightmarish, and combined with the relentless heat, it caused me to endure many sleepless nights, through which I tossed and turned, damp with perspiration and weary with conjecture. In the black of those heavy, sultry nights, my mind flew off on wild tangents, recalling legends of vampires and fantastic blood-sucking creatures of the jungle. This illustrates very well, I believe, just how thin the veneer of modern learning is, and how it can be rendered even more superficial by climate and temperature.

MEANWHILE, Myra's condition was growing steadily worse. I could not give up hope of saving her, but my dismay mounted as I was forced to watch her weakness increase. It was early in August when the sweltering heat had reached its peak, that Myra entered that most dangerous stage in which she lapsed into prolonged comas, regaining semi-consciousness only long enough to take a bit of food. With despair I realized that soon she would lapse into a coma from which there would be no rousing. Death would slip up on her quietly as she slept—and there was nothing I could do. Perhaps intravenous injections would sustain her for a time, but even so her life would soon hang on the hands of the clock.

At a few minutes after eleven o'clock, on the night of August fifteenth, I was in

my library studying a recently acquired treatise on rare diseases of the tropics, when my phone rang and Nurse Wilkins, speaking from the sanitorium, informed me that Myra had regained consciousness a few minutes before and was asking for me. Wilkins stated further that my patient seemed to have more strength than she had shown for weeks, and was asking for me with a strange persistency. I told Wilkins to remain with Myra and I would leave immediately for the sanitorium.

I will never forget that drive to the city. The night was black and velvety, and the air seemed to be composed of a heat that possessed actual substance and weight as it pressed down on the smothered earth. Any gleam of stars and moon was blotted from the skies by a black shroud of sultriness.

As I drove down the highway, few cars passed me, and except for the night cries of of the insects, I was alone in the night. On either side of the road grew fields of corn and truck gardens of tomatoes, cabbages and other common table vegetables. Never had their been such luxuriant crops. The farmer's only problem was insects, which the heat and moisture favored impartially with the crops.

No doubt it was my own weariness, born of the lateness of the hour, the cumulative enervation of the long weeks of intense heat, and my constant worry over Myra that brought on the extravagant fancy as I drove through the deserted night that the world was intent only on vegetable germination and growth, and that for the time being everything else was of minor importance—swept aside, as it were, from the normal, natural course of life. It was almost as if I could hear the faint crenulation of the leaves as they unfolded, and the rustling and crackling of the stalks and ears as they grew. In the pall of the night there was something repellant, grotesque about the great swollen tomatoes that bulged on the creeping vines, filling the air with their unmistakable vegetable reek.

I shivered in spite of the heat, as my car carried me down the corridor of towering grain. I felt strangely lonely, like an alien being—an outsider in a world of vegetation, where the sole purpose of existence is to grow, grow and grow in the beaming rays of the sun and the secret moistures of the sultry nights.

III

IT WAS a few minutes past midnight when I entered the lobby of the sanitorium and made my way to Myra's suite.

Wilkins, who had been sitting by the bed, arose and quietly greeted me as I entered. A green-shaded bed-lamp standing on a table was the room's only illumination. Gently moved by the electric fans, the sultry night air of the room stirred with an almost liquid motion.

The figure on the bed was pathetically wasted. There was almost no resemblance to the handsome Myra Bradshaw who had stirred the imagination of the world with her beauty, bravery and daring. As I gazed at the pale face, the eyes opened and on seeing me they lit up with an animation they had not shown in weeks.

"Come closer, Tom," the bloodless lips whispered. I seated myself on a chair at the side of the bed and bent my head over the still form.

"You sent for me, Myra?" I asked.

"Yes, Tom," replied the thin voice. "I want to tell you my story. It is now or never," she added with a suggestion of the grim, brash humor that had been so much a part of the old Myra Bradshaw's great charm.

"Plenty of time, Myra," I said, patting her emaciated wrist. "You are better now than you've been for days."

"You know that's not true, Tom," the woman replied. "This is only the final flash of light before the darkness. There is very little time left. Let us not waste it. You must hear my story."

"Very well, Myra," I assented. "I'll listen, only don't tire yourself."

"I haven't spoken until now," the woman began, "because I did not believe what must always have been the truth. Tom, you were right when you suspected that the jungle was responsible for my condition; but you were wrong in searching for a disease. It is no malady that afflicts me . . at least no ordinary malady!" Myra paused briefly and then her pitifully weak voice continued.

"It began less than a year ago. I was in

Leopoldville, when I first heard rumors of a strange village of natives deep in the Belgian Congo, who worshipped a flower, periodically sacrificing the fairest maiden of the village to this *fleur de mal*. Theatrical as the story sounded, I knew Africa well enough to suspect that the rumor very probably had a foundation of truth. I determined to be the first white woman to penetrate to this little known village of the interior, as well as the first white woman to set eyes on this jungle flower of God. Well, it was the old story. The natives were suspicious of strangers; they had not seen more than half a dozen white men in their lives, and I was the first white woman they had ever seen. They resisted our visit, attacking our bearers. We were forced to wound a few natives to make them behave and to convince them of the effectiveness of our modern arms. Later, of course, we treated and healed their wounds, so really we did them no harm."

MYRA paused in her recital, a far-away look in her eyes as she relived for the moment that last weird adventure. Gaining strength to continue, she picked up the thread of her strange story.

"We had no difficulty in locating the temple of the Flower God. It was a bower of unearthly beauty, teeming with such riotous colors and growth as only the jungle can generate. It was nature's own Gothic cathedral with towering walls of infinitely foliated leaves, climbing vines, massive pillars of trees and a green filigree of creepers. Its stained-glass windows were woven of thousands of exotically hued petals.

"I had come, bearing in mind the stories of human sacrifices, fully expecting nothing less than a monster, carnivorous plant—a fly-catcher plant on a giant scale. But I was wrong. There was no such plant. Instead, on an altar-like dais of the cathedral blossomed one, small, red flower. At first sight, I was disappointed. It might have been any one of a thousand jungle flowers. But upon approaching it more closely, I perceived that it did not grow from the soil. What it did grow from sent a chill of horror through me. That blossom was supported by a stem that reared from the gaping mouth of a long-dead native girl. Stifling my revulsion, I saw that natural decomposition of the girl's body had never taken place. Her skin hung about her frame like a loose, brown sack that was beginning to fall to shreds. But inside the shell of her skeleton, Tom, I glimpsed the real evil of this devil flower."

Myra paused momentarily, and in her expressive eyes was reflected something of the horror she was recalling.

"That skeleton was filled with an interweaving and inter-lacing network of tiny green feelers and roots that perfectly and completely duplicated what had once been the arteries, veins and capillaries of the unfortunate girl's body.

"The high priest of this jungle temple sullenly explained to me that the flower blossomed only once each year, producing but one small seed. This seed, when fully ripened, was given in food to the carefully selected sacrifice. A short time later, the victim began to weaken and waste away as the seed germinated, and spread its tiny tentacles, roots and feelers through her circulatory system; each of the thread-like feelers drinking of the victim's life blood, until at last the sacrifice died, and the flower blossomed miraculously from the mouth of the dead girl.

"The priest informed me further that the flower I was observing was about to go to seed, as the plant had absorbed all the blood of the girl's corpse.

"Horrible as the priest's story was, it fascinated me. I determined then and there to carry that fabulous seed back to civilization and put the tale to test by attempting to germinate the seed in a solution of animal blood.

"But the priest was cleverer than I," Myra continued. "During the night, he or one of his servitors must have removed the flower and its seed capsule. I was disappointed, of course, but I wanted no more trouble with these natives, whose enmity I had already earned by violating their sacred flower temple, and the whole idea of the flower and plant was so alien and repellant, that I thereupon dismissed the seed from my thoughts, and decided to head back to the coast immediately.

"We remained only one more day in the village, making observations and gathering additional data on the customs and beliefs of these remote savages. It was that one day,

I am now convinced, that cost me my life," Myra concluded solemnly.

"Only one thing could have happened, Tom," she went on, beckoning me to silence, as I started to speak. "There just is no other explanation. That native priest, lusting for vengeance for the violation of his temple, managed in some manner to place the seed in my food. As a result, I am about to die—a modern sacrifice to a primitive jungle Flower God thousands of miles away."

"Nonsense, Myra!" I exclaimed. "Your mind is overwrought with your illness. This is certainly a strange story you have told, but you know as well as I that what you suggest is incredible."

"Is it, Tom?" Myra seemed to have spent her pitiably small store of strength in her narration, and now that she had finished her words were tired whispers. "Is it incredible, Tom? I wonder. You do not know the jungle as I do."

Myra's eyes closed and she slipped gently into sleep. I took her pulse and found it alarmingly weak. Nurse Wilkins, who had been a fascinated witness to Myra's story, was at my side. "Is there anything I can do, Doctor?"

"No," I replied with a sigh. "There's nothing either of us can do beyond waiting and watching. I think we should both be here, so I will remain for an hour or two."

Wilkins nodded, and with that knack that is a part of a nurse's training, made herself comfortable in a chair, although I knew she had been on duty far beyond the normal span of hours. I settled back into the chair at the side of Myra's bed. Through the open windows drifted the perpetual clamor of the crickets. The window curtains stirred dully in the hot night air.

THE torpor of the heat must have caused me to drop off to sleep, for it was more than an hour later when I was aroused by an exclamation from Wilkins. Instinctively I glanced at Myra. She was dead. She had died so gently and quietly as she slept that neither Wilkins nor I had been aware of her passing. Her eyes were rolled back in her head, her mouth slightly opened.

"Ah, well," I commiserated with a pang of real sorrow and regret, "at least she has gone without pain." For that slight consolation, I could be grateful.

I was about to phone to have the body removed, when my attention was drawn by a strange gurgling or rustling sound that issued from the throat of the dead woman. Wilkins heard it, too, for she was staring as fixedly as I.

And then it happened. I shall state it simply with as few words as possible, describing merely what both Nurse Wilkins and I witnessed with no attempt to theorize or elaborate. For when one is describing the impossible—the incredible

As Nurse Wilkins and I stared, petrified, a red abomination that I at first thought was blood, caused perhaps by an internal hemorrhage, spread from the mouth of the dead woman. Then, even while my senses revolted, I was forced to see it for what it really was. It was not blood, but a blood red blossom, unfolding its petals before our very eyes as it reared upward on a pale green stem. In a few short seconds the nightmare flower had completed its deathly growth and was about four inches in width, while the stem supporting it emerged some six inches from the mouth of the corpse. Had my very life depended upon it, I don't believe I would have been able to stir a muscle during those seconds that seemed an eternity. I was as transfixed as any serpent charmed by a Hindu's piping. In that brief blink-of-time all my years of scientific training and learning were blasted to nothingness by the impact of the impossible taking place before my eyes.

It was a noise that broke the spell—the noise caused by steely-nerved Nurse Wilkins collapsing in a heap on the floor. She had fainted dead away. Instantly my mind snapped back into action like a spring suddenly released from tension. Thoughts flew through my head at a furious pace: I knew exactly what must be done. Removing a small pen-knife from my pocket, and fighting down an overwhelming revulsion, I stepped to the bed and forced myself to slip the blade of the knife between the lips of the dead woman, while I severed the stem of the flower in her throat. Then I thrust the clammy blossom into my coat pocket, and gently and tenderly closed the eyes and mouth of what had once been Myra Brad-

shaw. When I finished, the body appeared a normal corpse.

Nurse Wilkins' eyes were fluttering open. In a moment more I had her resting in a chair, staring blankly at me, and muttering, "What happened, Doctor? I—I must have fainted." A few sips of water refreshed her further, and in a few minutes she was her old self, if a trifle shaken. But she remembered nothing beyond the fact that she had dozed, then had awakened to find Myra Bradshaw dead. All memory of the hideous episode of the flower was wiped from her mind. The defense mechanism of Nurse Wilkins' mind was functioning in a manner that would have delighted an amateur psychoanalyst. The mind of this practical, hard-headed nurse simply couldn't accept what it had been forced to record. So, it had resorted to the mechanism of a fainting spell to reject and blot out the incident. Nurse Wilkins remembered nothing beyond awakening to find Myra Bradshaw had died. Then she had fainted—because of the heat and the long months of overwork and extra hours, she stoutly asserted. At any rate, the very next day Nurse Wilkins departed bag and baggage from the sanitorium, grimly determined on a long-delayed and long-needed holiday.

To my relief I discovered later that Myra Bradshaw had left specific instructions that her body was not to be embalmed. Instead, it was to be consigned, whole and untouched, to the heat of the crematorium. I shuddered to think of the green horror of tiny filaments and delicate lacements the mortician would have found growing through the blood vessels of the corpse.

For by this time I had come to accept Myra Bradshaw's deathbed story in its entirety. Once the incredible had been demonstrated as factual, I found my inborn scientific curiosity re-asserting itself. I wanted to know more about this weird flower—this *fleur de mal*, as Myra herself had so rightfully termed it. After reporting and recording Myra's death, I hurried through the cloying, humid air of the early morning to my home, my mind busily working all the while, revolving about that curious abomination that lay concealed in my coat pocket.

I had determined to carry out an experiment that would prove to me once and for all time, beyond the shadow of the slightest doubt, the final truth or falsity of Myra Bradshaw's story.

IV

AS SOON as I reached home, early as it was in the morning, I went to my laboratory and there carefully prepared a solution of animal-blood in a beaker. In it I placed the flower, depositing the beaker in an incubator that would keep the beaker and its contents at blood heat.

That night was five weeks ago. In that time I have replenished the blood in the beaker, keeping the flower supplied with the life-giving fluid it required to remain fresh and blooming. I have made several deductions regarding the blossom. It appears to be an ordinary flower, not unlike the common garden variety of poppy. It possesses no special attributes of motion or action. Unlike the carnivorous fly-trap plants of Africa, it cannot move when excited by foreign stimuli, nor does it sustain itself on flesh. It appears to be an ordinary plant, except that it grows out of a bath of blood, instead of a bed of soil. Also, unlike the fly-trap plant, it is not a tuber, but is a seed-bearing plant. The seed capsule was well formed and had almost reached maturity last week. It was then I noted that the blossom first showed signs of beginning to fade and wilt. This morning, when I examined the flower, I found it almost entirely wilted and apparently lifeless. I determined that tonight I would examine the seed.

Today I could think of little else than the seed, as I went through my routine calls and duties. The late September sun shone with all the heat of August, to which was added the brief fury that accompanies the harvest and brings the final climax of growth to the plant world.

When the day was finally finished, and I had partaken of a light dinner, I retired to my laboratory and flung wide the windows to admit whatever stray breeze there might be. The sun had already set and the horizon was alive with wriggling serpents of heat-lightning, accompanied by a continuous cannonade of thunder, the faint rumble sounding like the approach of a ghostly artillery. Would the coming storm succeed in break-

ing the relentless grip of the summer's heat? I hoped so fervently. As a doctor, I knew full well the toll this unusual summer had taken in my own small community. Heat prostrations, heart attacks, sunstrokes—all had been far higher than average during these past four months. But now it was late September and the magnitude of the storm that threatened promised real relief from the ghastly heat.

Then I forgot all about the approaching storm, as I turned to the wilted, lifeless flower and the dry seed pod that seemed somehow to epitomize and concentrate in itself all the miserable heat and sultriness of that long summer of torrid sunshine and misty rains. Perhaps it was my subconsciousness linking the origin of the blossom with the jungle-like heat we had endured throughout this strange summer.

Turning from the window, I removed the beaker of blood and the flower from the incubator. The wilted petals dropped away as my hand touched them. The firm, rounded seed capsule was easily detached from the stem. There it lay in the palm of my hand—a small, brownish-red ovule, not more than three-quarters of an inch in length. I cracked the protective shell that enclosed the seed. The fibrous husk fell apart and I discarded it. In my hand lay the seed. Moving to the lamp, I adjusted my spectacles and peered closely at the object in my palm. And then I gasped with shock and amazement. Could I believe my eyes? Did I really see it?—a palely greenish-white image, a miniature human shape, not more than half-an-inch in length, and as delicately and exquisitely formed as a bit of Chinese jade!

The window draperies suddenly whipped aside as a blast of hot air swept into the room. There was a terrific crack of thunder and a brilliant dagger of lightning stabbed its way through the inky black heavens. During the next few minutes the elements stormed their most eloquently. The fury burst with a violence that seemed to shake the very earth. The wind mounted steadily, moaning eerily as it veered around the corners of the house. Great drops of rain were hurled noisily to the earth. It was the prelude of what proved to be an autumnal tempest. But not even the dramatic raging of the storm could distract my attention from the object I held cradled in my palm.

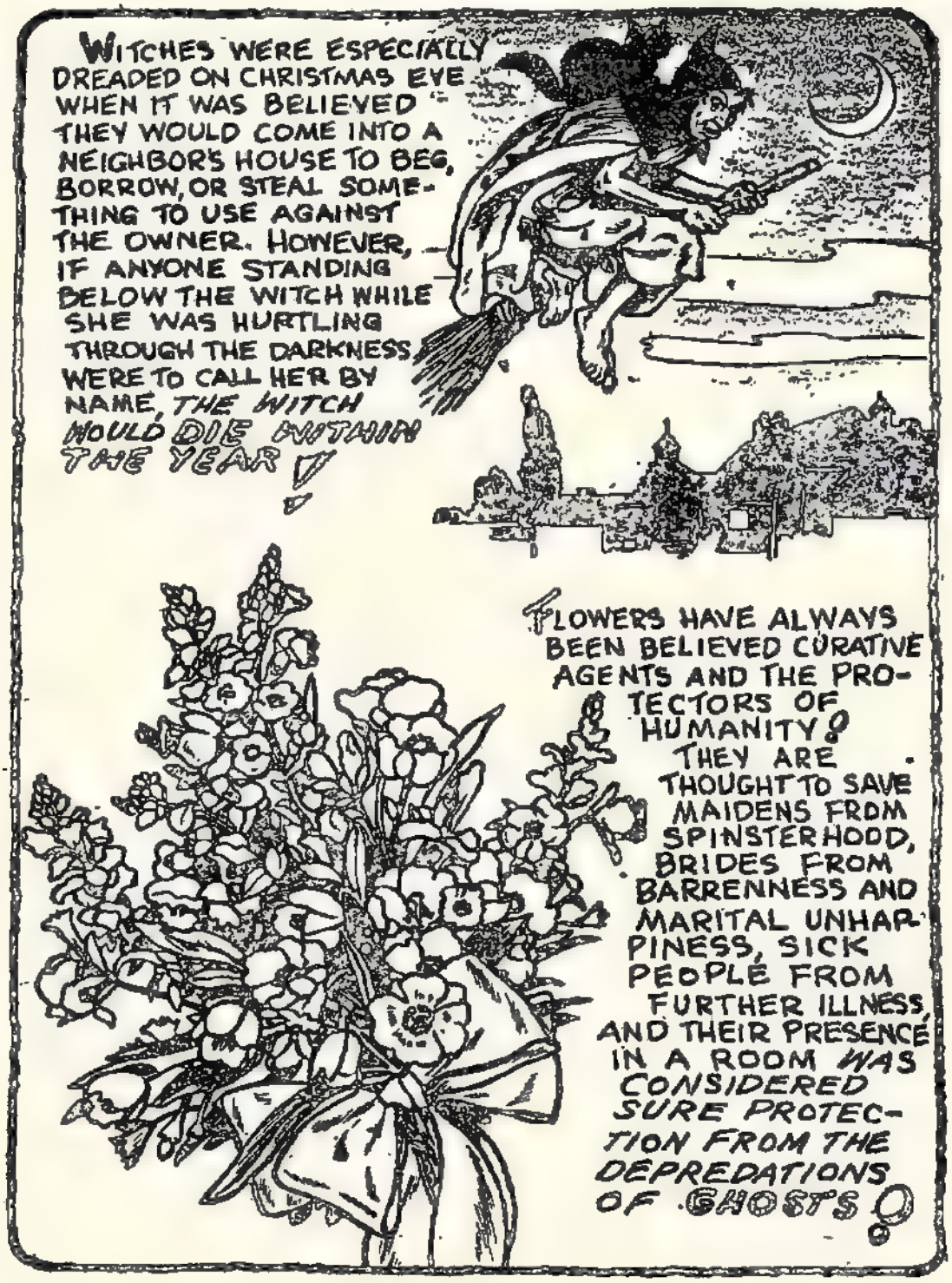
Hastily I shut the windows to close out the ravening wind and the pelting rain. Then I seized a powerful magnifying glass and brought it to focus on the faintly-chill and clammy bit of vegetable growth in my hand.

It was then that I saw the ultimate, yet horribly logical terror that finally and completely verified Myra Bradshaw's story. As I trained the powerful lens on the seed, there came a blinding flash of lightning, accompanied by an ear-splitting roar of thunder that seemed to explode in the garden just outside my laboratory. My electric lamp went dark, plunging the room in complete blackness. Then came another, more prolonged flash of lightning, and while I stared I saw in that glaring light, more vivid than any noon-day sun, that the tiny figure in the palm of my hand was a perfect likeness in every minute detail, to every last delineation of feature—a miniature replica of Myra Bradshaw herself!

While I stared in that weird intensity of illumination, just before the chamber was once more shrouded in blackness, the half inch seed effigy stared back at me, peering up through the thick glass of the lens with blank and soulless eyes that flashed suddenly open revealing hazel depths flecked with gold, while the beautifully formed limbs of the figurine squirmed and threshed about in mindless motion.

Superstitions and Taboos

By Weill



Mr. Bauer and the Atoms

Each one of us is a human bomb, powerful enough to destroy the world!

BY FRITZ LEIBER

DR. JACOBSON beamed at him through the thick glasses. "I m happy to tell you there is no sign whatever of cancer."

Mr. Bauer nodded thoughtfully. "Then I won't need any of those radium treatments?"

"Absolutely not." Dr. Jacobson removed

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

his glasses, wiped them with a bit of rice paper, then mopped his forehead with a handkerchief. Mr. Bauer lingered.

He looked at the X-ray machine bolted down by the window. It still looked as solid and mysterious as when he had first glimpsed a corner of it from Myna's bedroom. He hadn't gotten any farther.

Dr. Jacobson replaced his glasses.

"It's funny, you know, but I've been thinking . . ." Mr. Bauer plunged.

"Yes?"

"I guess all this atomic stuff got me started, but I've been thinking about all the energy that's in the atoms of my body. When you start to figure it out on paper—well, two hundred million electron volts, they say, from just splitting one atom, and that's only a tiny part of it." He grinned. "Enough energy in my body, I guess, to blow up, maybe . . . the world."

Dr. Jacobson nodded. "Almost. But all safely locked up."

Mr. Bauer nodded. "They're finding out how to unlock it."

Dr. Jacobson smiled. "Only in the case of two rare radioactive elements."

Mr. Bauer agreed, then gathered all his courage. "I've been wondering about that too," he said. "Whether a person could somehow make himself . . . I mean, become . . . radioactive?"

Dr. Jacobson chuckled in the friendliest way. "See that box at your elbow?" He reached out and turned something on it. The box ticked. Mr. Bauer jerked.

"That's a Geiger-Müller counter," Dr. Jacobson explained. "Notice how the ticks come every second or so? Each tick indicates a high-frequency wave. If you were radioactive, it would tick a lot oftener."

Mr. Bauer laughed. "Interesting." He got up. "Well, thanks about the cancer."

Dr. Jacobson watched him fumble for his panama hat and duck out. So that was it. He'd sensed all along something peculiar about Bauer. He'd even felt it while looking over the X-ray and lab reports—something intangibly wrong. Though he hadn't thought until now of paranoia, or, for that matter, any other mental ailment, beyond the almost normal cancer-fear of a man in his fifties.

Frank Bauer hesitated at the corridor leading to Myna's apartment, then went on. His heart hammered enragedly. There he'd gone chicken again, when he knew very well that if he could ever bring himself to state his fear coldly and completely—that crazy fear that a man's thoughts could do to the atoms of his body what the scientists had managed to do with uranium 235 and that other element—why, he'd be rid of the fear in a minute.

But a man just didn't go around admitting childish things like that. A human bomb exploded by thought! It was too much like his wife Grace and her mysticism.

Going crazy wouldn't be so bad, he thought, if only it weren't so humiliating.

FRANK BAUER lived in a world where everything had been exploded. He scented confidence games, hoaxes, faddish self-deception, and especially (for it was his province) advertising-copy-exaggerations behind every faintly unusual event and every intimation of the unknown. He had the American's nose for leg-pulling, the German's contempt for the non-factual. Mention of such topics as telepathy, hypnotism, or the occult—and his wife managed to mention them fairly often—sent him into a scoffing rage. The way he looked at it, a real man had three legitimate interests—business, bars, and blondes. Everything else was for cranks, artists, and women.

But now an explosion had occurred which made all other explosions, even of the greatest fakeries, seem like a snap of the fingers.

By the time he reached the street, he thought he was beginning to feel a bit better. After all, he had told the doctor practically everything, and the doctor had disposed of his fears with that little box. That was that.

He swabbed his neck and thought about a drink, but decided to go back to the office. Criminal to lose a minute these days, when everybody was fighting tooth and nail to get the jump. He'd be wanting money pretty soon, the bigger the better. All the things that Grace would be nagging for now, and something special for Myna—and then there was a chance he and Myna could get away together for a vacation, when he'd got those campaigns lined out.

The office was cool and dusky and

pleasantly suggestive of a non-atomic solidity. Every bit of stalwart ugliness, every worn spot in the dark varnish, made him feel better. He even managed to get off a joke to ease Miss Minter's boredom. Then he went inside.

An hour later he rushed out. This time he had no joke for Miss Minter. As she looked after him, there was something in her expression that had been in Dr. Jacobson's.

It hadn't been so bad at first when he'd got out paper and black pencil. After all, any advertising copy had to make Atomic Age its keynote these days. But when you sat there, and thought and thought, and whatever you thought, you always found afterwards that you'd written:

INSIDE YOU "TRILLIONS OF VOLTS!

You wouldn't think, to look at them, that there was much resemblance between John Jones and the atom bomb. . . .

UNLOCKED!

THE WORLD IN YOUR HANDS

JUST A THOUGHT—

Frank Bauer looked around at the grimy street, the windows dusty or dazzingly golden where the low sun struck, the people wilted a little by the baking pavement—and he saw walls turned to gray powder, their steel skeletons vaporized, the people became fumes, or, if they were far enough away, merely great single blisters. But they'd have to be very far away.

He *was* going crazy—and it was horribly humiliating. He hurried into the bar.

After his second bourbon and water he began to think about the scientists. They should have suppressed the thing, like that one fellow who wanted to. They shouldn't ever have told people. So long as people didn't know, maybe it would have been all right. . . . But once you'd been told. . . .

Thought was the most powerful force in the world. It had discovered the atom bomb. And yet nobody knew what thought was, how it worked inside your nerves, what it couldn't manage.

And you couldn't stop thinking. Whatever your thoughts decided to do, you couldn't stop them.

It was insanity, of course.

It had better be insanity!

The man beside him said, "He saw a lot of those Jap suicide flyers. CRAZY as loons. Human bombs."

Human bombs! Firecrackers. He put down his drink.

As he hurried through the thinning crowd, retracing the course he had taken early in the afternoon, he wondered why there should be so much deadly force locked up in such innocent-seeming, inert things. The whole universe was a booby trap. There must be a reason. Who had planned it that way, with the planets far enough apart so they wouldn't hurt each other when they popped?

He thought he began to feel sharp pains shooting through his nerves, as the radioactivity began, and after he had rushed up the steps the pains became so strong that he hesitated at the intersection of the corridors before he went on to Myna's.

He closed the door and leaned back against it, sweating. Myna was drinking and she had her hair down. There was a pint of bourbon on the table, and some ice. She jumped up, pulling at her dressing gown.

"What's wrong? Grace?"

He shook his head, kept staring at her, at her long curling hair, at her breasts, as if in that small hillocky, yellow entwined patch of reality lay his sole hope of salvation, his last refuge.

"But my God, what is it!"

He felt the pains mercifully begin to fade, the dangerous thoughts break ranks and retreat. He began to say to himself, "It must have hit a lot of people the same way it hit me. It's just so staggering. That must be it. That must be it."

Myna was tugging at him. "It's nothing," he told her. "I don't know. Maybe my heart. No, I don't need a doctor."

She wandered into the bedroom and came back with a large waffle-creased metal egg which she held out to him, as if it were a toy to cajole an ailing child.

"My cousin just landed in San Francisco," she told him. "Look at the souvenir he smuggled in for me."

He got up carefully and took it from her.

"Must be your dumb cousin, the one from downstate."

"Why?"

"Because, unless I'm very much mistaken,

this is a live hand grenade. Look, you'd just have to pull this pin—"

"Give it to me!"

But he fended her off, grinning, holding the grenade in the air.

"Don't be frightened," he told her, "This is nothing. It's just a flash in the pan, a matchhead. Haven't you heard of the atom bomb? That's all that counts from now on."

He enjoyed her fear so much that he kept up his teasing for some time, but after a while he yielded and laid the grenade gingerly away in the back of the closet.

AFTERWARDS he found he could talk to her more easily than ever before. He told her about the Atomic Age, how they'd be driving around in an airplane with a fuel-tank no bigger than a peanut, how they'd whisk to Europe and back on a glass of water. He even told her a little about his crazy fears. Finally he got philosophical.

"See, we always thought everything was so solid. Money, automobiles, mines, dirt. We thought they were so solid that we could handle them, hold on to them, do things with them. And now we find they're just a lot of little bits of deadly electricity, whirling around at God knows what speed, by some miracle frozen for a moment. But any time now—" He looked across at her and then reached for her. "Except you," he said. "There aren't any atoms in you."

"Look," he said, "there's enough energy inside you to blow up the world—well, maybe not inside you, but inside any other person. This whole city would go pouf!"

"Stop it."

"The only problem is, how to touch it off. Do you know how cancer works?"

"Oh shut up."

"The cells run wild. They grow any way they want to. Now suppose your thoughts should run wild, eh? Suppose they'd decide to go to work on your body, on the atoms of your body."

"For God's sake."

"They'd start on your nervous system first, of course, because that's where they are. They'd begin to split the atoms of your nervous system, make them, you know, radioactive. Then—"

"Frank!"

He glanced out of the window, noticed the light was still in Dr. Jacobson's office. He was feeling extraordinarily good, as if there were nothing he could not do. He felt an exciting rush of energy through him. He turned and reached for Myna.

Myna screamed.

He grabbed at her.

"What's the matter?"

She pulled away and screamed again.

He followed her. She huddled against the far wall, still screaming.

Then he saw it.

Of course, it was too dark in the room to see anything plainly. Flesh was just a dim white smudge. But this thing beside Myna glowed greenishly. A blob of green about as high off the floor as his head. A green stalk coming down from it part way. Fainter greenish filaments going off from it, especially from near the top and bottom of the stalk.

It was his reflection in the mirror.

Then the pains began to come, horrible pains sweeping up and down his nerves, building a fire in his skull.

He ran out of the bedroom. Myna followed him, saw him come out of the closet, bending, holding something to his stomach. About seconds after he'd gotten through the hall door, the blast came.

Dr. Jacobson ran out of his office. The corridor was filled with acrid fumes. He saw a woman in a dresing gown trying to haul a naked man whose abdomen and legs were tattered and dripping red. Together they carried him into the office and laid him down.

Dr. Jacobson recognized his patient.

"He went crazy," the woman yelped at him. "He thought he was going to explode like an atom, and something horrible happened to him, and he killed himself."

Dr. Jacobson, seeing the other was beyond help, started to calm her.

Then he heard it.

His thick glasses, half dislodged during his exertions, fell off. His red-rimmed naked eyes looked purblind, terrified.

He could tell that she heard it too, although she didn't know its meaning. A sound like the rattle of a pygmy machine gun.

The Geiger-Müller counter was ticking like a clock gone mad.

Satan's Phonograph

BY ROBERT BLOCH

THIRTY-THREE revs a minute. Thirty-three revs. Thirty-three revolutions That s the way it plays—night and day, night and day. The black disc on the playback of the recording machine, whirling around and around. Thirty-three times every minute. . . .

It looks just like an ordinary machine for making home recordings. But it isn't! You won't find any tubes or wires inside. I

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

An instrument of the devil, its contents created in hell!

couldn't begin to guess what *is* inside. The box is sealed -and its contents were created in hell.

Take a look at the record. You'd think *that* was ordinary, too. But you're wrong. Because when you play the record, you don't hear a human voice. You hear—*a human soul!*

You think I'm crazy, eh; babbling like this? Well, I don't blame you. I thought *he* was crazy, too, when he brought me that instrument of the devil — Satan's phonograph.

Yes, I thought Gustav Frye was mad.

I always knew he possessed the eccentricities of a genius; of course. Ever since he taught me the piano—as only Gustav Frye could teach it. One of the greatest virtuosos in the world; this little, shrivelled-up old man. He made a concert pianist out of me, and a good one. But even in the old days he was moody, filled with queer ideas.

He didn't concentrate on technique. "Let your soul express itself through the music," he would tell me.

I laughed, then. I thought it was just an affectation. But I know now that he believed it; and surely he taught me to go beyond mere mastery of the keyboard, into the realms of the spirit. He was a strange teacher, and a great one.

After Carnegie Hall, my first successes, I didn't see Gustav Frye any more. I went out on tour—traveled abroad for several years. It was on my European trip that I met and married Maxine.

When we came back here together, I heard startling news of my old teacher. Gustav Frye had gone mad, they said—he had been put away in an institution.

I was shocked, sorry, and anxious for further details. But nobody seemed to know the exact circumstances, and in the pressure of settling down once more, I overlooked the news for the moment.

Maxine and I took a little studio apartment uptown, and we were happy for a while.

And then—Gustav Frye came back!

I'll never forget the night. I was home alone. Maxine had gone out to spend the evening with friends. I remember that I was sitting before the fire stroking the black fur of Tiger, our cat.

Suddenly, the cat arched its back and hissed. Then silently, out of nowhere, Gustav Frye glided into the room.

He was little, and wrinkled, and old. He was clad in rags. But somehow, he looked terribly impressive. Perhaps it was his eyes —perhaps something that seemed to peer from *within* his eyes or *behind* them.

HE STARTLED me. I stammered out something trite, but he didn't respond. He kept looking at me and nodding his head as though marking the beat of some strange inward rhythm.

Oh, he was mad enough, and no mistake! I discovered that as soon as I ventured to comment concerning the big black case he carried under his arm.

I remember what he said as he set the case down and opened it.

"So, Roger, my old pupil—you want to know what this is, *ja?* You shall never guess! Twenty years I work to perfect this thing—this machine. I call it a machine because there is no other word you could understand; but it is not mechanical, *nein!*

"They laugh at me, Roger, when I tell them of my work. They call me crazy. They even lock me up; perhaps you hear of this?

"But I work. And I finish it. When I finish it, I break out of that place where they shut me away—and I come here to you. Now, look at this!"

I looked at the open case; at the two turntables, the cutting arm, the playback arm, the package of discs.

"Why, it's a phonograph," I said. "A home-recording machine."

Gustav Frye nodded—kept time, rather, to invisible music.

"And how do you make such a home-recording, as you call it?" he asked.

"Why, it's very simple," I faltered. "I don't know the technical process, but—you talked into a microphone, and the sound waves of your voice are electrically reproduced on the record. It's just a matter of vibrations impressed on the surface of the record; that's all. And when you play it back, you hear your voice."

Gustav Frye chuckled. Even his chuckle seemed to accent the rhythm to which his nodding head responded.

"Very good! You always were a smart

pupil, Roger. But you are wrong. This is not an ordinary recording phonograph. It does not capture voices alone. It captures—souls!"

I gaped at him. "Souls?"

"Yes, souls." He regarded me so earnestly that I felt pity for him in his delusion. "Sound is vibration," he said. "Well, vibration is the source of life. The atoms and molecules of your body are all moving, vibrating in certain set rhythms. They put out electrical impulses—wave-lengths which can be recorded. They have recorded heartbeat and thought-waves. But suppose you could invent a machine that would pick up the vibrations of your soul, of your life-beat itself?"

"Impossible!"

He nodded again, faster. "I have such a machine here," he whispered. "A machine to capture and record the human soul. Mind you, I said *capture* and record."

How I laughed at him, then! I thought if he knew I was skeptical he might stop his tirade and go away. But the old man insisted. He said he had always tried to capture the essence of the soul in music—but never succeeded. That is why he had worked on the machine. He wouldn't explain what he had learned or done; I might steal the secret, he said.

Oh, it was fantastic! In the end, I told him so to his face.

Then he became stubborn. He insisted on giving me a "demonstration"—with Tiger, the cat.

What could I do? One humors madmen, eh? So I humored Gustav Frye.

I ALLOWED him to set up his recording microphone there before the fireplace. It was just an ordinary microphone—in fact, the whole set appeared to be quite ordinary, though it bore no manufacturer's label. I wondered where he had obtained it.

He attached the mike to the machine, and put the cutting arm in place above a fresh disc. He had no brush, and I noticed that there were no sound-level controls visible to my eye. The mike extended on a cord, and when he lifted it, I saw that a tiny red light seemed to glow from the mike head.

That was curious—the light glowed; he appeared ready to cut a record, and yet he hadn't plugged any wires into a wall socket. Apparently the machine did not operate on electric current.

I started to question him, then checked the impulse. It would only provoke a harangue on his mad theories. And I wanted him to get it over with, go away before Maxine returned. It was embarrassing and disturbing. Better to humor him, now.

So I held Tiger, writhing in my arms, as he placed the mike before the cat's eyes. The red glare rose from the mike in inexplicable phosphorescence, and Tiger stared at it, spitting and hissing.

Then Gustav Frye started the cutting arm moving across the black record. Tiger howled into the microphone.

It only took a minute.

After that, old Frye lifted the arm, switched the record over to the playback turntable, and played the recording. I could hear Tiger howling—howling hideously with nerve-wracking clarity.

It disturbed me—that dreadful squalling. I told him to stop the record. He shrugged and lifted the needle.

Then I looked around. Everything was unchanged in the room. I still held Tiger under my arm. But Tiger wasn't struggling.

Tiger was limp. Tiger was cold. Tiger was—dead.

Yes. The cat was dead.

I can hear old Frye chuckling now, as I protested in sudden, incoherent rage.

"But of course, your cat is dead! Didn't I tell you that my machine *captures* the soul as well as records it? The sudden shock; the translation of soul-essence into vibration—that does it. So, you see, it isn't Tiger's voice you hear. It is his *soul!*"

I threw him out, then. Yes, literally threw him out. The old lunatic had frightened my cat to death—and I admit he scared me, too—with his crazy talk of putting souls on phonograph records!

I hustled him out of there in a sort of unreasoning fury. He protested with the fervor of the madman that he was. He had made me rich and famous, he said. Now he wanted me to protect him while he perfected his infernal machine. He had great plans; he and I could share the rewards.

I lost my head completely. I shouted at him to go away, to stay away.

Then he cursed me. He cursed me and swore revenge.

I hardly heard him. I was too busy hustling him downstairs. He scuttled off with his bulky machine under his arm; his head still nodding frantically as he wheezed threats under his breath.

I shouted after him that he'd better not let me catch him around here again—and I meant it.

But he came back. Yes—he came back! I found that out the next afternoon.

You see, I hadn't told Maxine about the madman. I knew it would only alarm her. I got rid of poor Tiger's body before she returned that night, and said nothing about the incident.

Then—the next afternoon—when I came back from a stroll after lunch, I opened the door and heard Maxine scream.

"Roger!" she shrieked. "Roger! Roger!"

I rushed into the studio. I saw Maxine there, lying on the floor. She was pale and lifeless.

But how could that be?

For I still heard her voice. She was screaming.

"Roger! Roger! Roger!"

She screamed my name over and over again, without a change of inflection; screamed it in utter agony.

Heaven help me, I knew *then!* I saw that accursed instrument over on a table, saw the record whirling and the needle pressing down.

The phonograph—Satan's phonograph—was grinding away.

I knelt beside Maxine's body and kissed her cold, dead lips—while on the record she screamed her endless torment.

"Roger! Roger! Roger!"

I KNEW how it must have happened, of course. Gustav Frye had sworn revenge. While I was away he had come here, talked to Maxine; probably persuaded her to record her voice as a joke. "To surprise Roger," he must have said.

Yes, Frye had lured her before the microphone—and captured her soul on the record!

I rose, took the record off. It was an ordinary black disc, and its surface seemed grooved in the usual manner. I held it and it felt cold; cold as Maxine's body. I couldn't think, couldn't comprehend what had happened.

After that I just sat there for a long time. It was quite a long time, because twilight crept into the room as I stared into the shadows and tried to think.

What could I do?

The police would laugh at me if I called them. The whole story was so incredible. But it was true!

Perhaps I had better destroy the machine, then find Frye. But that wouldn't help to bring Maxine back again.

What could I do?

I fell asleep, finally. Yes, I must have fallen asleep. And that's when Frye came back.

Yes, he must have tiptoed into the room in the twilight, nodding his head in that alien rhythm. And Frye must have seen me sleeping and hypnotized me.

Do you hear? He came to me in sleep and hypnotized me! He changed the records, put on a new disc, and held the microphone before my lips.

Then, as I slept, he commanded me to speak.

He made me speak these words—the words that put my soul on a record like all the rest.

Do you hear me? Do you hear my voice? Then *do* something!

Find that man.

Find Gustav Frye, wherever he may be—and destroy him. Destroy that hideous machine, too, before it is too late. And do something to get me off this record.

Yes get me off this record, do you hear?

Get me out of here . . . out of here . . . out of here . . . out of here . . . out of here. . . .

Pikeman

By AUGUST DERLETH

WHILE crossing high ground near a brook in the middle of woodland between two small villages, Jeffrey Morton came upon a solitary grave on the edge of a grassy shoulder of land, with a wood sloping down to the brook on one side and a field on the other, skirting very close to this deserted grave with its leaning headstone. Morton was a young-looking man in his early forties, fairly well-to-do, and at the moment indulging a whim to collect epitaphs; he had been at it over a month, and had managed to find a great many curious and amusing inscriptions in long-abandoned and forgotten graveyards. This lone grave, however, seemed to offer little beyond the conventional, until Morton sat down on it.

The headstone informed him that beneath this ancient slab was buried *Septimus Pikeman, Agent,* who had met his death, coincidently, just a century ago to the day—August 17, 1945. This information was followed by lines which, in one variation or another, Morton had come upon thousands of times:

"As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, soon must you be.
Prepare for death and follow me."

Have you ever sat on a grave and heard a voice, unmistakably from below, say "Aren't you going to invite me up?"

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

To all this, however, another hand had clearly directed that there be added a further line which had been put in very low down on the headstone, so that it was not until he sat down that Morton saw the half-obliterated lettering and pieced it out:

> He died by a hand not his own, but it were better had it been his own. Let no one call upon him.

"Well, why not!" exclaimed Morton, aloud, and grinned. Like many solitary persons, Morton had got into the habit of talking to himself. He began to wonder what Pikeman had agented, reflecting that the country through which he now traveled had only begun to be settled at about the time of Pikeman's death. He wondered by whose hand he had come to his end, and he began, somewhat romantically, to construct an imaginary character for Pikeman. Looking around him, he concluded that Pikeman was not buried in a cemetery, since there was no evidence of further graves, but off by himself. An outcast, perhaps? "But if so," he mused aloud, "why the stone?"

It was a substantial stone, despite all the wear it showed. He touched its rough surface and copied the curious line along the earth.

"Septimus Pikeman," he repeated to himself. It was a curious name. "Agent." How ambiguous! In a sense, it was vexing, too. "Well, Pikeman," he said absently, "how have you fared down there?"

"At last!" said a voice almost explosively from below. "You've been a long time."

Morton was romantically inclined in a very safe way, and somewhat imaginative. For a half-moment he fancied he had imagined the voice he had heard. But since he had heard it so plainly, this was difficult to believe. Quite naturally, he next assumed that someone might be hidden in the nearby woods; so he looked around, examining every tree of any size for a telltale shadow which might indicate someone in concealment. But this did not entirely satisfy him, for the voice he had heard had come distinctly and incontrovertibly from *below*. Just as he had begun, somewhat uneasily, to consider this, he heard it again, impatiently.

"Well, aren't you going to invite me up?"

Morton swallowed. "Come up," he said, a little thickly.

NOTHING whatever happened. For one ridiculous moment, Morton had thought that the earth on which he sat would heave and churn, and something horrible would come up. On the strength of his fancy, he rose to his feet with ungainly haste, and looked at the grave and its leaning headstone, momentarily expecting the sod to fissure and be thrust back. Nothing of the sort took place. A small wind hushed through the grass; a peewee sang in the nearby woods; a car hummed on the highway Morton had left behind, and far off to the north, a mail plane went roaring distantly over.

Morton took a deep breath.

"This is much better," said the voice again, this time coming from directly behind Morton.

Morton acted very much the way anyone in his place might act; he turned quickly and, seeing nothing, set off at a rapid pace which was just short of running in the most convenient direction leading away from the solitary grave. He ventured a glance over his shoulder from time to time, but nothing untoward appeared on the landscape. His thoughts were understandably somewhat chaotic. When finally his voice returned to him, he comforted himself by repeating aloud several times, "A touch of the sun!" By these measures and the very palpable fact that nothing pursued him, Morton was able to calm himself sufficiently so that when he walked into the nearby town of Karlin an hour later, he appeared to be a completely normal, if somewhat puzzled, traveler.

Karlin was down on his itinerary for an overnight stay; it rose in the midst of quaint, Old-World country. Itself primarily a settlement of Yankees transported to the Midwest, Karlin was surrounded by all manner of foreign settlements—Swiss, Swedish, Norwegian, Bavarian villages abounded in these parts, and their cemeteries might be expected to yield something odder and more entertaining than the average of those thus far visited. Karlin was modern and industrial, on several railroads, and offered a

choice of hostelries, from among which Morton chose the best and most obviously long-established.

After dinner, having had a good two hours in which to think about Septimus Pikeman and his curious experiences at Pikeman's grave, he made an effort to look into the history of the region, and found his way to the public library, which was open. Karlin had been platted and, to all intents, founded, in 1852, and Morton, with some experience in these matters, wisely sought the half-century anniversary issue of the local paper.

This he read diligently, but it was not until he came upon a corner put away under the heading of "Legends" that he found any mention of Septimus Pikeman.

> One of our most eery tales is that of Septimus Pikeman, the Indian Agent who defrauded government and red men alike, and who ended up at the end of a rope put around his neck by Indians and early settlers in the region. The man, Pikeman, claimed to be the 'seventh son of the seventh son', and therefore to be possessed of more than ordinary power, to some degree supernatural. This none believed except an old Indian medicine man, one of the Winnebago tribe then living here where Karlin now stands. This old fellow decreed that the defrauding agent's body should be buried in an out-of-the-way place, and not in a regularly used cemetery, to prevent anyone from inadvertently 'calling up' Pikeman, and thus giving him new body and life. This was done, and the curious may see Pikeman's grave opposite the apex of the angle of Benson's Brook coming in from the north along the east, and Highway Z, along the southern boundary of the area. Despite the vigorous belief of the Indian medicine man that Pikeman's grave should be allowed to vanish unmarked, some of Pikeman's relatives had a headstone erected. After it had been set up, the medicine man had an additional sentence of his own cut in by a member of his band. Despite all the legends which have grown up about Septimus Pikeman, he has rested securely in his forgotten grave.

AN INDIAN agent, of course; in pioneer country, that would be the expected kind of agent one would encounter. Morton's uneasiness was not entirely allayed, but he was nevertheless attracted to Pikeman as a figure in a legend, and, when he found outside, sunning himself in the late evening sun, an old gaffer who bore every evidence of having been in on the founding of Karlin, even if but a babe in arms, he struck up a conversation with him leading gradually up to the subject of Pikeman.

"Septimus Pikeman?" repeated the oldster. "Heard the name. Sounds Yankee, all right. No Pikemans living here now."

Another oldster, who had come up, put in, "Why, that old crook used to run these parts till they got wise to him and run him out."

"Slander!" said a third voice vehemently, but Morton, who was somewhat confused, could not determine which of them had said it; it almost seemed to him, judging by the way in which the two old gaffers stared at him from under beetling brows, that he himself had taken umbrage at this wanton condemnation of Pikeman.

Morton wanted to make further inquiries about Pikeman, but, while he was pondering what line to follow, he asked, in the most natural way, whether there were any Indians still living in this part of the country.

"Ain't seen Indian since about 1890," said one of the old man.

The other fell to arguing that a certain local chieftain's band had passed through the town in 1892 for the last time, and this waxed hotly for a few moments, while Morton slowly regained his bearings.

"This Pikeman must have been quite a character," he said.

"I knew a Miss Abby Pikeman once. Lived out on County Trunk K. Nice little woman. She's dead, though," offered the first of the two old gaffers.

"Died twenty-one years ago," offered the other.

This was manifestly not very helpful, particularly since the two old men immediately began to debate this point also.

"Hifers! Old Pods!" exclaimed Morton in disgust, and turned on his heel, with the

gaffers staring in perplexed indignation at his retreating back.

The sound of the words rang in his ears. What in the world had he said? Morton was an educated man, he was a tolerant man —how had he come to burst out at the old men who were only obliging him? He repeated his words to himself, wonderingly; he did not know what they meant, except to realize that they were not terms of endearment. He retraced his steps to the library and there, after some diligent search, found in an old Bartlett *Glossary of Words and Phrases Usually Regarded as Peculiar to the United States* (1859) that the words he had used meant, respectively, "loiterers," and "old men." The words had quite evidently become obsolete in the language of the day, however current and "peculiar to the United States" they had been a century ago. How he had come to use them—unless he had chanced upon them in recognizable context long ago—was inexplicable to Morton.

Insidiously, Morton began to feel a vague alarm mushrooming up inside him. He had the conviction that something was happening to him, something all the more unpleasant because of its intangibility. The sun had set now and, though an afterglow still lingered along the western rim of earth, Morton felt impelled to turn his steps in the direction of his hotel.

He paused at the desk, where the clerk observed that his brow was beaded with perspiration. He asked for something to drink to be sent up to his room in a little while, half an hour or so, and went to his room.

Even there, however, he did not feel at ease. If anything, he felt more uneasy than ever. When he attempted to rationalize his reactions, he came to nothing save an uncertain belief that he was not alone in the room, any more than he had been outside; yet there was manifestly no one in the room with him.

Unless—if it could be—his hallucination ?

MORTON loosened his collar a little. He licked his lips nervously. He looked around, very carefully, not knowing what he expected to see. He saw nothing but what had always been in the room, except for the limited accoutrements of Morton's walking tour, which would depart with him in the morning. Nevertheless, his growing uneasiness was not alleviated. As he sat there, he began to put together all the incidents of the day, specifically since he had chanced upon that solitary grave, and he began to perceive a hideous pattern in the trivial experiences he had had.

Very soon he was caught between the usual two horns of a dilemma. If he looked on the one side, he saw every event of the day linked with every other; if he looked on the other, he saw himself setting a trap for himself. But this would not do. He thought that there was one way in which he could settle the matter, at least fundamentally.

He looked hunted, when he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. And he felt hunted.

He swallowed again, bolstered his courage, and said dubiously, "Pikeman?"

"Sorry to be making so much trouble for you," said a familiar voice, "but it will soon be over."

IN DUE course of time—which in the matter of Jeffrey Morton, lost without trace—was a full month, a detective retained by a distant relative to uncover Morton's whereabouts arrived at the Hotel Karlin, a dutiful watchdog on the trail, and immediately set about to make the routine inquiries.

Did the management recall Jeffrey Morton? He began to describe him.

He was halted in the middle of his description. Yes, the management recalled Jeffrey Morton—with some reason. An extraordinary person.

The detective pricked up his ears and listened.

"We thought Mr. Morton a very queer person," said the manager. "Sort of, you might say, a Jekyll and Hyde fellow."

The detective pointed out dryly that Jeffrey Morton was a creature of unalterable habit, and there must be some mistake.

The management did not think so. But, to reasons.

Morton had come to the Hotel Karlin representing himself as a collector of epi-

taphs, on a walking tour. But, actually, he had left his epitaphs behind and had departed from the town by train. The epitaphs were produced and identified as in Morton's handwriting; the list included that last cryptic line: *He died by a hand not his own, but it were better had it been his own. Let no one call upon him.* This made no impression on the investigator whatsoever.

"The bell-boy went up to the room to take up some whiskey and soda Mr. Morton had ordered. The first time he reached the door, he hesitated to go in because there was an argument going on inside."

"Ah, what kind of argument?"

"I remember what he said. He overheard Mr. Morton saying in a loud voice, 'No—for God's sake! Get out!' Mr. Morton's companion then was heard to say, 'That place of mine out there is a little damp at times, but otherwise comfortable enough. As a matter of fact, though, you won't need it.' "

The detective could make nothing much out of that, either.

"The second time," continued the manager, "he went in with the drinks. Mr. Morton was alone." He said that Morton looked very disgusted over something and when the boy came up to him, Morton threw these epitaphs to the table and said, 'Hell of a thing for a grown man to fiddle away his time on!' "

"Morton said that?"

"Right. We remembered it because we understood that he had been at making that collection over a month. Naturally, it seemed very strange to us."

The manager went on to recount facts. After Morton had come in on the one and only night he stayed at the hotel, he had twice telephoned the desk. The first time he asked that any kind of map of the 'Western areas' of the United States be sent up to him. The second time was about an hour later; then he wanted the desk to send out and get him a ticket for Butte, Montana."

"Did you get it?"

"Yes."

"Did he use it?"

"He checked out next morning and asked the way to the railroad station. We have no reason to believe he did not use it.

"Any conversation when he left? Argue about his bill or anything like that? Morton occasionally did, I understand."

"Nothing like that. But he said something in its own way even more surprising, in view of the initial representations he made of himself. He said he was off for the West, and the last thing he said to the clerk was this: 'There must certainly be some Indian territory in the West, with the need for a good Indian agent.' "

THE detective, with virtually an unlimited expense account, went all the way to Butte, Montana. It was a good opportunity, and he took it. His quest, however, was not fruitful. He found no trace of the object of his search. Jeffrey Morton certainly got on the train in Karlin, but he might have got off anywhere. The hotel registers failed to reveal anything. The detective found only one name with an ambiguous address registered at one of the hotels in Butte on the day Morton would ordinarily have arrived in that city. He looked at it a long time.

"Septimus Pikeman, Agent. Eastern U. S."

It meant nothing to him, and in due time he returned to Chicago, reported his failures, and collected his fees. Jeffrey Morton got a number in a long list of unsolved disappearances and that was his sole immortality.

Weird Tales

is on the air . . . . in

STAY TUNED FOR TERROR

This programme is adapted by ROBERT BLOCH from his stories which have appeared in WEIRD TALES, the narrator being Craig Dennis.

STAY TUNED FOR TERROR is produced by Neblett Radio Productions, with the active cooperation of WEIRD TALES MAGAZINE . . . for the enjoyment of fantasy fans everywhere.

LOOK FOR ANNOUNCEMENTS IN YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER giving the broadcast time and dates in your area.

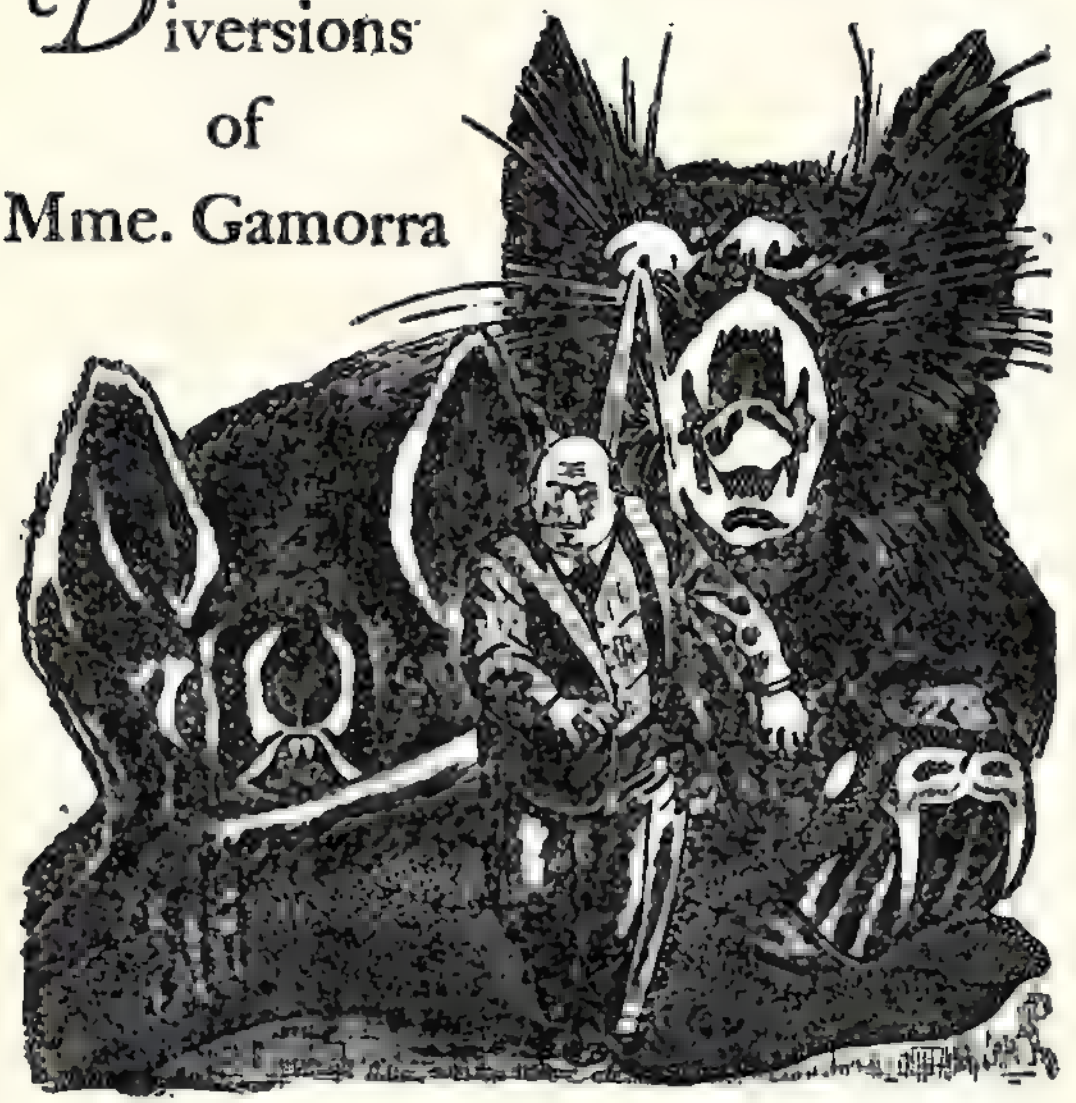
~★~

And remember to . . . .

Stay Tuned for Terror!

The Diversions of Mme. Gamorra

BY HAROLD LAWLOR



. . . it might have been a rat, but a rat grown to monstrous, misshapen proportions

HE COULD stop now. He's run far enough. Maybe. But in any case he *had* to stop. Here in the shadow of the great oak, its bark rough and reassuring under his touch, he had to stop to still the pounding of his laboring heart, to wipe from his forehead the dew of fright and exertion, to ease from his gross body the fear-sweat shirt.

But he couldn't halt this convulsive shivering, as of a million loathsome crawling things inching their way on icy feet up his shrinking back. He couldn't control the jerking of his head—jerking, jerking spas-

Heading by A. B. TILBURNE

medically over his right shoulder so that his dilated eyes might sweep behind him over the sandy, hump-backed country road, searching, fearing to see again the thing, creature, *it* that had crossed his path back there near the Gamorra farm.

But what *was* it? What had *it* been?

Osbert Horland cowered against the oak, peered down the sandy road. Air sucked into his lungs, agonizingly. He waited. Cloud-wrack covered the moon, swept on.

Nothing. Not in ten years had Osbert Horland thanked his Creator for anything, but—oh, blessed God! Nothing. It was gone.

But it had been there. His vision hadn't tricked him, nor his fear. If there was anything on God's green earth it had resembled at all, it might have been a rat. But what a rat! A rat grown to monstrous, misshapen proportions. A rat that magnified a thousandfold your natural repugnance for one of its kind.

Osbert had been walking along, coming home, when suddenly it had crawled from the ditch at his left, directly into his path. For a breathless moment they'd both stopped, paralyzed. The thing had seemed equally startled. Then it had scurried into the underbrush, he had heard the crackling of its passage. And Osbert, galvanized, had started to run wildly, panic-stricken, his great belly shaking, his balding head glistening under the intermittent light of the moon.

God!

He wiped his forehead anew. He swallowed carefully to settle his queasy stomach.

The thing had made no move to attack him. He'd have died of sheer terror if it had. It was fully three or four feet wide and possibly five feet long, and its four small legs held it barely six inches above the ground. It had no neck; its flat skull merged directly into its short-haired, dun-colored body. A body that was shallow, like a turtle's. But a turtle was a clean, a normal thing.

It was not.

Again, at the memory, Osbert swallowed hastily. But it was useless this time. He turned and retched helplessly.

Someone should warn Madame Gamorra, he knew hazily, through his nausea. But not him. Not now. He couldn't go back. Not alone. Not on foot. A little farther on, and he'd be safe. Home. He'd get Ada. And the car. The thing in the road had even made him forget the fiasco of his marriage with Ada. For once he'd be glad to get home to her. For once he'd welcome her companionship.

Nervously he left the shelter of the oak, with many a backward glance, stepping high as if even yet he feared treading on—*it*.

ADA was on the sofa, in satin lounging pajamas, indolent as a sleek black cat. Even now, shaken as he was, Osbert wondered again that people ever thought her attractive, with her black bangs, her wise green eyes, her scimitar-slim body.

He never had. He'd married her only because she'd led him to believe she was rich, the lying, devious, little—!

She looked up as he came in. "Why, it's Osbert! My darling, my own true love." As always, specious endearments tripped from the tongue that he sometimes thought the devil had touched. She delighted in pretending theirs had been a love match, much to his irritation, though they'd both long since known the truth.

But he ignored her inflection now. He stood there, his fat jowls ashen. "Ada—"

"Why, whatever is it, lover?" She put down her book falsely solicitous. "Tell Ada what troubles you."

Her eyes, her lips mocked him. But haltingly he forced himself to tell her of the thing in the road.

"What an imagination you have, Osbert!" she said, when he finished. He writhed under the mocking way she pronounced his name. Everyone else called him Ozzie. "Are you sure you didn't dream it all? Just as you dreamed of the vast riches you told me you had?"

As usual, she succeeded in baiting him. His recent fear was swallowed up in a swift surge of anger. She'd never let him think well of himself. She seemed determined to tear down the facade he'd been years in building. He couldn't stand it. It was getting under his skin.

"Stop talking to me like that!" he cried. "In that sneering, superior sort of way—"

"Superior, Osbert?" The green eyes were delighted. "You know I'm definitely your inferior when it comes to turning a dis-

honest penny. Shady deals, gypping here, cheating there—"

"I can't help it if I'm cleverer than other people," Ozzie said sullenly. "Anyway. You're just sore because I lied about my income. Don't know why you should feel so set up about yourself. You did the same thing to get me to marry you. You're no better than I am."

She stretched languidly, nodding agreement. "We're just a couple of bums who out-foxed ourselves. Hoist by our own petards, whatever they are. How the gods must have laughed! I suppose I ride you because you're such a stuffed shirt. I'm phony, and I know I'm phony. But you—you small-time pork-and-beaner!" Her green glance withered him. "*You* try to fool even yourself. You can't face the truth about yourself. Small wonder I find it such fun to deflate you, you big windbag!"

The lazy purl of her voice nearly maddened him. "If you don't like it, why don't you get out?"

"Oh, I will, duck, never fear. I'm keeping my eye open for a likely young feller. He might be slow in the coming, but in the meantime—" she gestured with the book in her hands—"this is a roof over my head, and two can live as cheaply as one. Cheese and kisses with you, in a word, till my knight comes riding along."

Ozzie gritted his teeth. If he could only slide his hands around that throat, claw at that smug, smiling face!

"Some day," he snarled, "I'm going to kill you!"

But Ada only laughed. "Oh, no, you won't. You'll just continue to take anything I care to dish out, sweetheart. And like it. You'd never put your fat neck into a noose just for the pleasure of finishing me off."

Well, that was true enough, Ozzie admitted to himself in a rare moment of honesty. But just the same, the time would come when he could get back at her safely. And when that day arrived, by gad—!

BUT he was forgetting. With an effort, he controlled himself. Why did he idle in profitless argument with Ada when there was that creature in the road, up to who knew what?

"Come on," he said. "We must warn Madame Gamorra. If that thing gets in among her Angora rabbits—"

Not that he gave a damn about Madame Gamorras' rabbits. It was the woman herself, an enigma since moving here five months before. No one had been able to learn anything about her. It had galled Osbert more than a little that he'd been unable to add anything to the general lack of information, for he liked to pose as an oracle about the countryside and an authority on its inhabitants. Here was his chance to visit her house, learn something of her.

Besides, she appeared to be wealthy, and —who knows? There might be something in it for him.

Ada must have sensed his eagerness and made her own deductions. For perversely, to devil him, he supposed, she refused to go. "What's the old woman to me? When she first came here, I called, and she wouldn't even let me in. We've never seen her, except at a distance."

"Then I'll go alone!" Osbert cried rashly.

"Hurry back, Romeo." Ada returned to her book, indifferently. "You know how I pine when you're gone."

Ozzie swallowed an oath. But he had to go now, despite his reluctance. Because if he stayed, Ada would know he was afraid. It would be one more thing for her acid tongue to scorge him with. Damned if he wouldn't rather face that horror in the road!

The driveway to the garage was dark, and he didn't feel safe until he was in the sedan, with the doors shut. Even then he switched on the tonneau light to be sure there was no one—no *thing*—in the car with him. The dread of it returned in full force now that he was again alone.

He backed out, still smarting under the memory of Ada's voice. He hated her, more and more. But what could he do? He had no grounds for divorce. He couldn't even beat her; for he was afraid of her. Under that languid exterior, she could take care of herself. He remembered her long scarlet fingernails. Yes, she'd fight back, pointed teeth and blood-red claws, like the cat she was.

Oh, if he could only think of something!

His headlights picked out the bridge over the narrow gully, and again Ada was for-

gotten. It was just this side the bridge that he'd seen—*it*. Panic overtook him again. What if the thing should run out in front of the car? What if he should run over it? In his imagination, he could feel the *squish* the thing would make under his tires. Ugh! His toes curled in his shoes at the thought.

It was a relief, then, to find the Gamorra farm dark when he reached it. Any respite was welcome. Anything that would keep him from the necessity of opening the car door, setting foot in that dark driveway, overgrown as it was with shrubbery that afforded excellent hiding places for lurking monsters. What were a few Angora rabbits measured against that horror? By now he really believed himself they were his reason for coming.

But—tomorrow. Tomorrow would do as well.

He needn't go back to Ada. He could drive instead to a tavern in town, and stay there late enough to insure that she would be asleep before he returned.

THERE was no one in the place but the bartender and Quale, the town's chief of police, who was having a beer. Osbert wanted companionship this night, longed for it. He lifted his bulk onto the stool next to Quale, though he knew the chief didn't like him. But the fellow couldn't very well get up and walk away, or ask Ozzie to sit some place else. It was a free country.

A conversation had evidently been going on for some time.

". . . and they don't know what happened to him?" asked Joe, the bartender, polishing a glass.

"Disappeared, like that." Quale snapped his thick fingers. "Last his wife knows, he went up to Gamorra's to do some carpentry work."

"Ain't wimmen the darnedest?" marveled Joe. "Beatin' her evvey night, purt'near, and now she's lookin' for him, 'stead of bein' thankful he's gone."

"Remember the time he held his youngest kid's hands against a hot stove for losing a dime?" Quale said. "I saw to it he got thirty days for that myself, and wished it could have been more."

"Who are you talking about?" Ozzie horned in.

The chief drank his beer then, so that Joe would have to answer. "Al Sneed."

"Oh," Ozzie remembered the hatchet face, the slitted sadistic mouth, the long lean figure in green-patched blue denims and torn tee shirt. He'd sold Al some substandard lumber last year, and he could still hear the thin mouth, voicing dire reprisals. But pshaw! Nothing had happened. Was it his fault Al wasn't sharper? Let the buyer beware.

"A rat, if they ever was one, that guy," Joe said. "He musta been just about the biggest rat in the world, you ask me."

Quale nodded. Ozzie remembered with a shudder. Was everything going to remind him?

"No," he said. "Not the biggest rat in the world. I saw that tonight up at Gamorra's place."

He told them, and whether they believed him or not, he didn't know. Probably not. For Joe laughed.

"Say, maybe it was Al you seen," Joe cracked, cackling.

Ozzie let it go. Let them think it was funny if they like. But he'd seen it. He wished he could forget the damned thing. He'd dream of it tonight.

WHEN Chief Quale left, Joe shook his head sadly. "Yes, sir! Chief Quale is mighty upset about the disappearance of Al Sneed. He's got to find him, or it just won't look right."

"Can't see why," Ozzie objected idly. "Al was worthless. Good riddance, I'd say.

"Well'—" Joe let the word imply polite agreement. "Still when you take it with that other disappearance, why, say! Makes the chief look like he just don't belong in his job."

"What disappearance? Oh, you mean—"

Joe nodded. "Annie Cowell. Up and gone these two months, no one knows where."

Ozzie remembered, but he did not sorrow. Nerve of that old maid, Annie, lighting into him just because he'd sold her mother that mining stock. Annie said her mother's death was his fault, that her discovery the stock was worthless had killed the old woman. But pshaw! Her heart would have given out anytime, probably. When the garrulous, bitter Annie disappeared, it was no skin off

Ozzie's nose. He'd been relieved, and had quickly forgotten her.

"'Course there were plenty people," Joe went on, "who hated Annie. Said she was a malicious gossip, a viper. Said she whispered lies about that little young Mrs. Morton till she broke up with her husband. And she drove that druggist, Alwyn, out of business, hinting he made too many mistakes in prescriptions. Came out later, it was all lies, started because Alwyn went around with her for awhile, then dropped her.

"Yep, guess you could call Annie a viper, right enough. Well, anyway, she went up to that Mrs. Gamorra's to do some sewing, and ain't never been seen since. Mrs. Gamorra said she left when she finished her work, and that was all *she* knew about it."

Joe surveyed the polished glass lovingly, chose another. He thus missed Ozzie's start. But—Gamorra's, Ozzie thought. Funny both disappearances should bring in Madame Gamorra.

Joe stopped polishing the glass. "Say, that's kind of peculiar—"

Ozzie held his breath. He didn't want anyone else connecting those disappearances too obviously with Madame Gamorra. Not just yet, not till he found out if there could be anything in it for him. But he needn't have worried. Joe was thinking of something else.

"Come to think of it," Joe said, "both them people were like animals, kind of. If a snake's a animal. There was Annie, a viper, and Al, a rat." Joe laughed sheepishly. "Well, shucks, I just thought of it," he apologized.

Ozzie hardly heard him, for his mind was busy. More than ever he was determined to visit the mysterious Madame Gamorra. You never knew what could be turned to your profit. With which pleasant reflection he called it a day.

MADAME GAMORRA, Ozzie discovered next morning, was almost incredibly the wicked old duchess of fiction. He'd half-expected to be denied entrance, at least at first, but she received him in the living room—black-clad, withered, her coiffure a dyed jet cuckoo's nest above her raddled face. Her liver-spotted hands, covered with dirty gems, rested on the gold head of her ebony stick. Her pointed chin rested on her hands. And her sharp black eyes watched Ozzie scrutably as he told her of the thing in the night.

Ozzie was in his best form. His courage, such as it was, always rose with the sun. Now—pink-shaven, white-flannel-clad, self-important—he was heroic.

"I returned later, of course, with a gun to protect you," Ozzie finished, lying pompously, "but I saw no sign of the creature. And as your place was dark, I hesitated to disturb you."

"Ah, so?" Madame said. "That was most kind of you."

Didn't she believe him? Was there a faint ironic cast to her words of gratitude? Ozzie shifted somewhat uncomfortably under that steady gaze. The woman was amazingly self-contained. Prowling monsters, it would appear, had no power to alarm her.

"It looked like a monstrous rat," he said uneasily.

"It *was* a rat," Madame answered, her eyes on the rings.

"What!" Ozzie cried. "You've seen it, too? You *know?*"

Madame raised her head. "You misunderstood my inflection, Mr. Horland," she said suavely. "I said: 'It was a rat?' "

But she hadn't raised her voice questioningly the first time, Ozzie was sure. She'd made a definite statement, and now must be trying to cover up her obvious break. He shifted uncertainly in his chair again. He scented something wrong here, radically wrong. Madame was much too polished. Urbanity, to Ozzie, was always suspicious. He used it himself when he was most nefarious.

But he'd better accept her explanation, for the moment, anyway. The wordly Madame Gamorra, he saw, was no silly creature to be stampeded easily into damaging admissions. His curiosity aroused to the boiling point, he turned the conversation to rabbit-breeding, about which he knew nothing and cared less, and hinted he'd like to see more of the Gamorra farm.

Again she surprised him by making no demur. He wondered if she knew he was wary of her, and hoped to allay his suspicions for all time by seeming frankness. At any rate, she rose and offered to show

him about the place. Despite the cane, she was neither lame nor feeble. Osbert would have preferred to poke about the farm for himself, but there was nothing for him to do but offer Madame his arm.

They went out through the kitchen, where a middle-aged foreign-looking servant, whom Madame addressed as Tina, was stirring something in a pot on the coal-burning range. She looked up incuriously as they passed, but it seemed to Ozzie that a significant look was exchanged between maid and mistress.

The farm was smaller than he'd supposed, and there was really nothing to see but a series of white-washed hutches containing soft furry docile-looking rabbits. Only one thing aroused his interest. A small square white shed, nestling under maples, at the far end of the hutches. It looked innocuous enough in itself, but it seemed suspicious to Ozzie that Madame Gamorra was taking such elaborate pains that they should not approach this building too closely.

"And what is that structure there at the end?" Ozzie gestured grandiosely.

"It is nothing. Merely the shed in which the rabbits are plucked. Now over here, I plan a rock garden. Come. Your arm, if you please, Mr. Horland."

The wind changed, and Ozzie thought he caught a faint whiff of something unpleasant from the direction of the shed. An odor of decay, and something else indefinable. Before he could determine with exactness what it was, Madame slipped her hand through his arm. It was done skillfully, but Ozzie had a feeling he was being out-maneuvered. Certainly Madame was succeeding in leading him farther away from the small white shed under the maples, covering her purpose with an effortless flow of small talk.

Osbert's interest was whetted still more.

But the visit, as a whole, would have been dull and unproductive if they hadn't elected to return by way of the kitchen. Perspiring freely from his slight exertion, he asked if he might have a drink before returning to his car. And thus it was that they came upon the maid, busily feeding clothing into the maw of the great black range, in which a fire was now roaring despite the heat of the summer day.

The sight seemed to arouse Madame to a fury. She unloosed upon the maid a frenzy of foreign invective that reduced the woman to sniveling abjection. Abruptly the storm was over. A swift glance at the studiedly impassive Ozzie, and Madame erased all trace of emotion from her face.

Gently steering Ozzie from the kitchen into the entrance hall, Madame said, "These servants. But they are of a stupidity! Wasting fuel, on such a day!"

But Ozzie wasn't fooled. That wasn't the source of her anger. He had seen. That clothing. The faded blue denim levis with their distinctive patch. The red and white striped tee shirt. It had been Al Sneed's costume for months.

And Al Sneed had vanished.

Just as gently, Ozzie resisted Madame's efforts to propel him to the door. He turned instead back into the living room.

"I think I should like a further word with you, Madame Gamorra," he suggested silkily. And his small eyes disappeared in creases of feigned good humor.

MADAME, evidently, was a fatalist. Good! It should simplify matters. One sharp glance, then she seated herself calmly enough opposite him, and the attention she bent upon him was admirably courteous. Ozzie, not to be out-doné, was equally polished. They might, you'd have thought watching them, be going to indulge in a courtly discussion of abstract matters.

But Ozzie confidently spoke of murder.

"Chief Quale," he began blandly, "is very anxious to locate Al Sneed." A significant glance at Madame. "Or his *body*."

Madame shrugged. "He would find no trace of Mr. Sneed here."

"I recognized that clothing," Ozzie said bluntly.

Madame spread her hands. "It is destroyed by now."

The woman was fencing with him. Ozzie betrayed no annoyance. He waxed, instead, ponderously arch. "Come, Madame Gamorra! Enough of this quibbling. I can be a most persistent fellow, I assure you. If I should send Quale here, he'll make a thorough investigation next time. A word from me, and he'd be most interested in that shed out there that I'll wager he skipped over before."

This was a shot in the dark, but it worked. Alarm flickered in the black eyes watching him so intently. Ozzie felt a glow of satisfaction.

"I see," Madame said thoughtfully. Surprisingly, she threw back her head and laughed heartily. Wiping tears of mirth from her eyes, she said, "You are a most amusing gentleman, Mr. Horland. Shrewd, too. And your purpose in all this? Surely you can care nothing for the fate of Mr. Sneed. I understand men, Mr. Horland. I can have your silence for a price, is it not so?"

Ozzie beamed. He couldn't resist rubbing his hands together in his pleasure. This was more like it.

"Is it money you wish, Mr. Horland?" Madame regarded him amiably. "Name your price. I admit I should not like the—inconvenience, shall we say?—of an investigation into that shed. And money means nothing to me."

Ordinarily, money would have been his first consideration. But that could wait until later. At the moment, something else was of prime importance to him.

"It would appear, Madame, that you have successfully murdered Al Sneed. I am equally confident," Ozzie said, paying no attention to Madame's gesture of protest, "that you also murdered Annie Cowell." Ozzie cast down his eyes, and sighed windily. "Alas, I am most unhappily married."

He looked up under his thick white eyelids at her. Madame needed no diagrams. "It is your suggestion, then, I murder your wife?"

It was Ozzie's turn to look shocked. "Madame! Need we put it so baldly?"

Her rings seemed to fascinate her. She never took her eyes off them. "There is only one error in your reasoning, Mr. Horland. I didn't murder those two people. I merely turned them into the creatures that they were."

Ozzie looked annoyed for the first time. "You disappoint me, Madame Gamorra."

DID she think him a fool? Certainly she had murdered Al and Annie. Their bodies were buried beneath that shed out there. Why else was she so anxious to avoid a visit from Quale?

She was looking at him now, shaking her head. "You do not believe. You think I am insulting your intelligence. Nevertheless, I speak the truth."

It was ridiculous to prolong the discussion. But he heard himself asking, "What would be your purpose, even supposing—?"

"Ah, *zut!*" Madame clicked a thumbnail contemptuously against her teeth. "Always there must be the reason for everything, the logic. Can nothing, then, be done for one's own amusement? But listen, if you must. Long ago, in another country, my late husband was a power in politics. In the course of time, he fell into disfavor with a certain regime, involved himself in serious trouble. Trouble from which his friends might have rescued him. But did they? They did not, Mr. Horland. They turned their backs. They took, but they never gave. Ah, we learned then what some people could be like! In his despair, my husband killed himself."

Madame's eyes blazed, fire behind ash. "Later, in my bitterness, I reflected upon this: What, I wondered, would they be like if people of that sort were reduced to their least common denominator, their unpleasant qualities magnified? What manner of ugliness should we not look upon? The idea held interesting possibilities to one in my frame of mind. I had loved my husband dearly. Perhaps, in my grief, I had grown a little mad. But, at any rate, I began to investigate, to probe into things perhaps best forgotten."

Ozzie's bulk seemed to shrivel in his chair, though he felt his cowering to be absurd. Surely he would be more than a match for this crazy old woman if she should grow violent?

"Dusty books, dead legends," Madame was saying softly, remembering. "I shall not bore you with a recital of my researches. It is enough to say that the peasants of my country, stupid though they appear outwardly, know many things they do not tell. They taught me much. Too much, perhaps." For an instant the black eyes were hooded as if they could not bear to contemplate the things that they'd looked upon. "It was fascinating, fascinating. I experimented over a period of many years. At long last, successfully. Ah, Mr. Horland, you should have seen my lovely collection of—shall we call them *animals*, for lack of a better word?"

Ozzie shut his jaw with a snap. The woman's voice had been persuasive. "Wh-where are they?" he asked, in spite of himself.

"The war, the war," Madame said impatiently. "I was forced to destroy them when I fled. Now I start anew. A smaller collection, perhaps, but more select. Tina, on her errands, learns and brings me gossip of the more unpleasant characters about the countryside. I find her help invaluable."

Madame eyed him grimly. "So you speak no more to me of murder, Mr. Horland. Your wife? Certainly. I shall be happy to dispose of your wife, that I may be left to my hobby in peace. I, Luzia Gamorra, offer you my assurances."

Madame sank back, exhausted.

Ozzie stared. Though her cold emotionless words had sounded so cerebral, clearly the woman was insane. But—was that bad? Insane people were often crafty. Certainly she'd been clever enough in the past to fool Chief Quale. What did it matter, then, if Madame chose to think herself a Circe, rather than a murderess? For of course her story was ridiculous.

True, he'd seen with his own eyes that monstrous rat in the road. But faugh! It had probably been small enough. Only magnified by darkness and the flitting moonlight and his own shock at seeing it. A freak, no doubt, escaped from a traveling carnival. What did it matter? The important thing was to get rid of Ada.

"It is agreed, then," Ozzie said, collecting himself. "There remains only the difficulty of getting Ada here."

"That will not be necessary," Madame said.

Ozzie impatiently waved her to silence. Did she think he wanted Ada murdered in his own house? Madame's reasoning was erratic. But then, of course, she was a lunatic.

"I'll send Ada here tomorrow," he said. "Wait till then."

ADA greeted him with an emerald glance of distrust.

"What have you been up to now, my sweet?"

"Up to?" Ozzie looked shocked. "My dear Ada!"

"Ah, ah, ah!" She wagged a chiding finger. "You can't fool Ada. Canary feathers on your chin, dear heart! Don't tell me you've succeeded in rooking Madame Gamorra already?"

"Not at all," Ozzie denied stiffly. He must play this right—so much depended on it. "I found her very charming. She and her neph—"

Ozzie stopped in embarrassed confusion, pretended to bite his lip.

Ada smiled thinly. "Oh, she has a nephew? I wonder I've never seen him around."

"He has just arrived for a visit." Ozzie made it seem a grudging admission.

Reluctantly—or so it appeared—he let her pump him for the rest. And gradually there emerged a picture of a young man, unattached, handsome enough, apparently moneyed. The nephew of Madame Gamorra, who had no existence save in the fertile imagination of Osbert Horland.

Ada was puzzled when he finished. "He sounds like the ideal second husband for me. I wonder this hasn't occurred to you? It seems strange you were so unwilling to tell me about him. Surely it would be fatuous of me to suspect you of jealousy?"

Osbert's glance agreed that it would, indeed.

Ada threw back her head and laughed. "There is only one other possibility, then. You planned to 'take' this young man yourself before I could do any mischief."

Ozzie permitted himself to look crestfallen. But his soul was doing nip-ups inside. It was working! It was working!

Ada looked at his sulky face, and laughed again. "Oh, Osbert! You'll be the death of me yet." She sobered suddenly and her eyes narrowed. "Get this, stupid. You're still in the bush leagues, and no match for me. You're riding for a disappointment, for I'm calling on Madame Gamorra tomorrow."

Ozzie said nothing at all. Stupid, eh? If Ada only knew!

TRUE to her promise, Ada left next afternoon for the Gamorra farm.

And she did not return.

Ozzie hardly dared to hope. He danced on the hot sands of suspense all that after-

noon and night. It was the following morning before he got in touch with Chief Quale, telling the man no more than was necessary. His wife had set out the previous afternoon for a walk, and she had not returned. No, there'd been no domestic differences. Yes, he was completely at a loss to explain her disappearance.

Quale, looking none too happy, promised to get busy on it.

Ozzie returned home. He had a bad moment at eleven o'clock when the bell rang. Damn it! He must stop this guilty jumping.

But it wasn't Ada. It was the surly Tina.

"Madame would like to speak to you," Tina gestured toward the road with the buggy whip she held in her hand.

Madame, still in her elegant rusty black, sat erect in a carriage beyond the gate. Ozzie wondered fleetingly where she had ever resurrected the vehicle; it suited her style. He lost no time in getting down the walk.

She greeted him with a slight inclination of her head. "I thought you would like to know that everything went off well."

Air leaped into Ozzie's lungs. "You mean—?"

Madame tapped his arm lightly. "I have such a lovely new pet, Mr. Horland. Though lovely only to my own eyes, perhaps."

"A p-pet?"

"But certainly. A cat. Oh, but a most unusual black cat!"

Ozzie understood then. Madame was still pretending. He ignored her circumlocutions. His heart leaped, and he exulted. It was done. Ada was dead. For a second he shivered apprehensively. Murder! No wonder Madame Gamorra shied from the word. But pshaw! *He* was safe enough. No one knew but himself and this foolish old woman. He could go on now to other things.

"Fine!" Ozzie said. "And now that that's out of the way, we can clinch the bargain."

Madame looked at him askance. "I don't understand you. I have fulfilled my part of the bargain. It is finished."

Ozzie shook his head, mock-regretfully. "Money, now. I must have money. You see, I reported Ada's disappearance to Chief Quale. But I neglected to mention the fact that the last time I saw her she was on her way to visit you. I'm afraid I led the good chief to believe she merely went out for an aimless walk." Ozzie cleared his throat delicately. "I should dislike to have it rectify any erroneous impression he might have received."

He smiled affably.

Madame pursed her thin old lips, and looked at him searchingly. "Ah, so. I under-estimated you, Mr. Horland. How you must have laughed at my naivete! But surely I am worldly enough to appreciate the jest, too. Come then." Her gesture invited him into the carriage. "We will drive to my place. I carry about with me no such sum as you doubtless expect to receive."

But Ozzie made no move to get in. "I fear you're still under-estimating me." He chuckled jocosely. "If I go to your farm, there is always the possibility I might join Ada. I shouldn't like a knife in my ribs, or poison in my drink."

Madame chose to find this entertaining. She shook her head fondly, as at an engaging child. "I've said it before. You're an amusing scoundrel, Mr. Horland. Clever, too."

"There isn't any hay in my hair," Ozzie admitted smugly.

"I'll send the money to you tomorrow. Come, Tina."

Ozzie watched the carriage roll off, the sand dripping from its wheels. He was glad she'd been so sensible about it all, but he thought it strange that she was still laughing as she drove away, for he'd stipulated a rather fantastic sum. Her cheerfulness disconcerted him a little until he reflected that, of course, the woman was mad.

Ozzie spent the rest of that day immensely pleased with himself. Every few minutes, quite unconscious he was doing so, he rubbed his hands together and chuckled. With the money he'd receive from Madame Gamorra, he could leave here and go to some city where there would be greater scope for a man of his talents. True, there'd be a slight delay. He must wait long enough for the talk of Ada's disappearance to die down. He must arouse no suspicion till Quale finished his investigations.

At the mental picture of Quale, even now busily engaged no doubt in running himself bow-legged after clues to Ada's disappear-

ance, Ozzie chortled and slapped his fat thigh. He wouldn't mind waiting. Not when he, and he alone, could really savor the joke.

Ah, but it was peaceful with Ada gone! No more would he be driven from his own home by the lash of her scorpion tongue. He read. He puttered about. He was still luxuriating in the freedom of it all when he retired that night.

HE AWAKENED with a start at three o'clock. His brow was wet with sweat. His lungs were laboring, his limbs threshing about on the bed. His eyes rolled widely, seeking aid that was not there. He cowered in superstitious terror, from this nameless feeling of menace. What was wrong? What was the matter with him?

It was growing stronger. Every atom of his being wanted to stay here where he was. Here in the quiet of his room. But there was this other thing. This inner urgency, this mad compulsion to rise. He *was* rising. He was on his feet, staggering to the hall, slipping, sliding down the stairs.

"No!" He sobbed weakly, his fat jowls shaking in terror. He fought every inch of the way, hanging back, digging his heels into the smooth oak of the steps, throwing the weight of his great bulk backward. He clung to the newel post, his wet fingers slipped.

New sensations now. Growing even more intense. Air, he must have air! He clawed at his night-clothes. His gross body stripped, his eyes still rolling wildly, he slipped and slid across the floor.

He heard it now. Someone was calling. "Come, Mr. Horland! *A moi*, my lovely! To me!"

Softly, gently came the calls, yet they would not be denied. Oh, that voice! Seductive! Irresistible! Bittersweet. Honey over acid. He knew now. *She* was doing this. She wasn't fooling him.

The door. Oh, God! He had to open the door. He *wanted* to go there now. He was out! He was free! He was running down the long white sandy road leading to Madame Gamorra's. He was going to kill her! To rend, to tear, to mutilate—!

BUT he fawned, he groveled. For she was waiting at her gate, still in somber black, a lantern in her hand. And her eyes and rings gave off an unholy light.

"Come, my pretty one!" wheedled Madame Gamorra, leading him down the winding lane to that shed under the maples.

He laughed in mounting hysteria. Slavering, he licked her hand. Obediently, he followed.

"The others—they're waiting for you. The cat, the rat, the viper. Listen to them!" A hissing, a spitting, a snarling. "How pleased they are at your coming!"

The thing at her side shrilled now piteously. But there was no one else to hear. Only the moon saw Madame open the door and admit to the eager presence of the others, a ponderous creature that might have been—

But, wait! Look again! Surely there was never cast in so grotesque a mold—such a *hideous* hyena?

A novelette of chills . . . .

by that master of w-e-i-r-d fiction . . . .

MANLY WADE WELLMAN

who tells us about the

"Twice Cursed"

coming in the next WEIRD TALES

All the Time in the World

BY CHARLES KING

"Thousands of years ago I had come here first; it had taken all this time to prepare me.

"BORED, eh?"

I passed my hand through the whirling, leaping flames and nodded, miserably.

"Hmmm. How long have you been here?"

He knew as well as I did. He was just teasing me. His great, yellow eyes had a trace of unmistakable amusement.

To show that I wasn't nettled, I fondled one of the glowing coals and watched the steam form unpatterned traceries through my fingers. "Three thousand years."

"And one month, fourteen days and thirty-seven minutes," he gravely amended.

I nodded again.

"Don't we treat you right?" His back was to me, but I knew that he was watching me closely just the same.

"Yes, Great Prince."

"You've received steady promotions, haven't you?"

"Yes, Great Prince." I kept my voice as steady as I could. It was not easy. I have seen what happened to others who didn't respond correctly to his questionings. Even

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

I, much used to certain sights, have felt dazed and faint at such times.

He turned suddenly and let his hot eyes bathe me with lurid light. I knew what he was doing and I was terribly, unaccountably frightened. Unaccountably, because I had not lied to him. Still, it is horribly unpleasant to know that your mind is being stripped clean and bare without your having the slightest chance of evading or resisting the process. Not that I would try to resist. I have seen the mottled remains of those who did. . .

And my mind swept back to that moment, thousands of years ago, when I had first come here. I had led a hard life, and a vicious life, but it had been quite successful from the viewpoint of financial success.

Many men . . . and women too . had fallen quick victims to my dagger or strangler's cord. I suppose the only good thing that I can claim is that I never attacked the poor. There was no reason to, of course. They had nothing worth stealing. I had finally been caught, as I knew I some day would.

I lived three days through the torture. I had never known that pain could be so exquisite. When they were finished with me I hadn't a whole bone in my body. I was just a mass of bloated flesh that could be formed into different shapes by kneading with the fingers. I couldn't scream curses at them because they had sewn my lips together . . . but before I died I made a mental vow. If there was a hereafter, and if we met. . . .

Well, we did. But I was running ahead of myself. Again my mind went back to the time when I had first opened my eyes. My first reaction had been one of surprise that I was still alive, but then I saw that I wasn't. Not alive, at any rate, as you would know it.

Anyway, amazingly enough I was standing on my feet. The feet, you will remember, which I had last seen as shapeless blobs of flaccid flesh.

"Name, please."

And when I had answered it came to me that my lips were no longer sewn together.

My questioner had looked up at me with quickened interest on hearing my name. His tail had dropped the writing implement it had been using, and its twitching motion had plainly beckoned me to follow.

WE HAD passed through many doors and along many twisting lanes. The walls gleamed redly . then seemed to move. But then I saw that it was only the red fluid on them that moved. It seemed to come from somewhere above, and I hadn't understood until a sudden burst of screams tapered off to strangled sobbing some place above me. I had realized then what the red fluid was . . . and where *I* was.

"This is as far as I go," my guide had grunted. He must have felt my amazement as I stared at the wall of twisting, flaring flame.

"Don't worry about that stuff . now. You're under His protection because He's expecting you. Go in and . . . good luck!"

I had tried to hold back, but it hadn't worked. Not even for an instant. There I was, moving through the dancing, flickering flames . . moving toward the great figure indolently sprawled on an ebony throne.

He had been caressing something in his huge hands. He had moved it this way and that, bending it, twisting it, occasionally rolling it into a ball. Heavy shadows had prevented me from seeing what it was, at first, but as I had drawn nearer the thin, tortured screaming from the object crumpled in his fingers corroborated what my eyes had tried to reject. I had led a life replete with viciousness; there was nothing that I had not done or attempted . ... but I confess that I averted my eyes from what He was doing to that human body.

He chuckled, and the sound was like rolling thunder: "Now don't tell me that *you're* squeamish."

"I'm sorry if I've offended you, Great Prince."

Yellow, enormous, the slanted orbs regarded me a moment. Then: "You've been given quite a privilege, you know."

"Thank you, Great Prince."

He tossed the mangled body into a corner where it continued to scream thinly. "Your earthly dossier proves that you have served me constantly, and well. I am pleased with you." His shining, jet hooves scratched

against the floor as he rose from the throne. "Come along. I'll show you your assignment."

Interminable corridors had been left behind when we finally arrived in a small room. Hooks were fastened to the white hot walls, and on each hook was impaled a human body. There were men and women, both, and a scattering of children. All faces were a blend of two expressions. Evil . . . and suffering.

A taloned finger flicked toward a table in the room's center. "You'll find some amusing instruments there. If you can devise any new ones the shops will be only too happy to make them for you." The cleft hooves had clicked across the floor, and I was alone.

I had been good at my work from the start.

A natural aptitude, I imagine. Anyway, the volume of shrieks, howls, groans and wailings I'd produced in my small workroom must have pleased him. It wasn't long before I'd been promoted to a larger place. Of course I really did my best work when my earthly torturers were, in time, consigned to me.

It was very enjoyable because I had limitless time in which to improvise. They had died once, and couldn't die again. You see?

A SHORT bark of laughter caught me up abruptly. He had been following my thoughts and apparently He was entertained. "So you are bored. Well, you're a good man—one of the best—and deserve a vacation."

I fell upon my knees in gratitude, but His sinuous tail jerked me erect. "No," he smiled, "let us thrash this out as man to—ah—"

He certainly was in good humor.

"What would you like to do?"

"Anything, Great Prince, in which I can serve you."

I meant it. And he knew it. "Very well. There is something which can afford both of us pleasure. However, it is dangerous . . . for you."

"I am ready, Great Prince."

His vast wings flapped idly. "I will send you to Earth for a while. You, without saying, will know what to do there."

Humbly I answered: "Spend my time, and efforts, Great Prince, recruiting subjects for your domain."

"You haven't asked me about the danger."

"No peril is too great to be borne in your service, Great Prince."

He smiled, and his red teeth shone brightly. "Heed me, loyal one. On Earth you will seem as all others . . unless you wish to change form. You will have that power—and many others. But my power, large as it is, is circumscribed. It is the immutable way of things and there is no changing it. If I repeat myself, it is only because you, loyal one, must be aware of the hazard which I can neither prevent nor remedy.

"As I have told you, your powers will be many and yours to command. Only—beware your bloodstream. You will be immortal impervious completely to destruction no matter what befalls . . but the fluid in you *must not be contaminated!*"

Back in the enormous, vaulted chamber, of which I had become Supervisor, I formulated my plans. I was not going to do anything that would cause undue comment at the beginning. Only fools would do that. Once I had seen my way around, and placed circumstances, I'd have plenty of time for extemporizing. One thing He had repeated to me clung tenaciously. I would be indestructible—but I would show signs of hurt. Nothing could disturb my immortality . . . only that outwardly, for a space, I would have all the signs and symptoms of human weakness of body if it were necessary. Undoubtedly this was necessary, if only to avoid questions . . . and suspicion.

Everything resolved itself and I was happy. My plan of action was set. I felt so good that I picked up an instrument of my own design and went over to one of the sobbing bodies hanging on the wall. My assistants were surprised because this was no longer part of my work. I outlined persecutions and savageries, even improved on them occasionally, but left the physical action to my crew. This, however, was a great moment and deserved some special attention.

My assistants naturally fawned as I worked upon the shrieking flesh that swayed before me. Frankly, though, I fully believe

that I outdid myself. It is no idle boast to say that when I got through you could not identify the tattered remnants that littered the smoking floor. Except—naturally—that they kept screaming!

NOW Blakely Julius was a very sick man. He was going to die unless, as his doctor said, he acquired the will to live. Blakely Julius didn't want to live . . . and I could understand that. For some time now I had had *him* marked in my ledger as a future assistant.

Yes, he was that bad. That is, as bad as *you* would call it. His actions had always proven that he would be wonderful administrative material for the Great Prince.

However, his conscience had tricked him and caught up with him. He wanted to die. That was all right . . but not if he died *his way*. We'd get him, anyway, but it would simply mean that we'd have to receive him as a victim. No. He was too good material to lose. So, before his conscience could betray him, he would die *our* way. It would serve the double purpose of serving the Great Prince well, and give me the chance of entering the world of Men unobtrusively.

At the same moment that his soul was whisked by me, down to the Great Prince, Blakely Julius opened his eyes. *I was Blakely Julius.*

"Darling . darling . speak to me . . say you're going to live. . ."

I looked up at the fat, heavily made-up face that hovered above me with such saccharine solicitousness. So this is my wife, I thought. A sharp, quick probing into her mind told me all that I had to know. She would make a fine victim for one of my assistants to work upon.

"Darling! Say something . . . please!"

And her nasty, brutish little mind said: *Oh, why doesn't he die! What keeps the fool hanging on so? It's just his meanness and stubbornness . . and here I have such wonderful plans for his insurance money. Die, you fool! Die, DIE!!*

And that fat, over-rouged face of hers said: "Darling speak . say something. . . ."

"Hello, honey, I feel much better."

Her mind: *No! He can't do this to me! He just can't! He's going to die. HE MUST DIE!"*

Her voice: "How wonderful! Oh, darling, I'm so happy."

The doctor bent over me. "That's fine, Mr. Julius. You've done what I could not do for you. You want to live again . . . and you certainly shall."

I smiled.

THERE was no purpose in rushing things. I had plenty of time. I had Eternity. I stayed in bed for a week, showing, by proper signs, that I was regaining my strength.

Watching my new-found wife was an endless source of entertainment. She so obviously wanted to kill me, and yet didn't dare. Bending over me, feeding me, I'd probe her mind and find it hard not to grin. Poisons of all sorts would silently occur to her and as silently be rejected. I would certainly have had a lot more respect for her if she'd tried something. The thoroughly damned fool couldn't know that it would have *helped* her if she'd tried to kill me. It would have caused me to lessen her tortures *below*—but she didn't, which gave me pleasurable speculation on her future treatment in the Great Prince's domain.

Seven days behind me, and I got up. She argued prettily against it, but I insisted.

Then, as I was finishing my coffee at the table: "Please be careful, sweet. Since you do insist on going to the office, watch yourself on street corners and don't walk too fast."

Her mind: *Let him die! Oh, God, let a taxi or a truck catch him and . . .*

My mind: *Don't worry, my pet, things are going to work out all right . . but not for you. I've got plans for you. I will unfold them tonight.*

Aloud: "I'll be careful, honey . . and thanks for everything. I'll have a big surprise for you tonight." At the door I kissed her, laughed inwardly at what she was thinking, and went down the walk to the bus stop.

My thoughts were busy as I rode to my office. I knew, naturally, about my employees; several I had already earmarked. Their minds would always be open to me for necessary information. No, it wasn't

that. It was concern about starting something big that would insure a steady delivery of mortal merchandise to the Great Prince. Short as the time I'd been on Earth I was already itching for action. I was always ambitious.

I got out at my stop, walked into my building and was whisked up to my office. I'd toyed with the thought of materializing myself at my desk, but there's a time and a place for humor. I am a very logical person. I always have been.

I OPENED the door to the main office and entered. My employees were lined up to receive me. Their congratulations upon my recovery fell in waves about me as I made for my desk. Most of them didn't mean it,—and they were the ones whose voices sung their gratitude the loudest.

Old Hamilton was pathetically glad: "It is good to see you again, sir. We were all quite worried." He meant it, too. He was the type who drew his salary and repaid it in full with loyalty.

"Thank you, Hamilton. By the way, how is your son?"

"He is improving, sir. The doctors say it is a matter of time."

It wasn't a matter of time at all. An instant of inner probing into his mind told me that. His son needed the attention of high-priced specialists. Hamilton couldn't afford that. As he walked away, my will slipped a quick thought into his unsuspecting head. By nightfall he would be resenting the fact that I had money for expensive medical attention and that his son hadn't. Tomorrow he would spend in brooding over ways and means of getting the money; and by nightfall he would have found a way of getting at the cash in the safe.

He would be caught. The Hamiltons of this world always are. The shame of giving way to dishonesty would be too much for him. Suicide, to him, would be the only way out. The Great Prince would welcome Hamilton to his realm . . . *personally*.

He is very fond of one-time sinners who take themselves—and their egos—so seriously. He reserves a special treatment for them. It is very interesting . . . and very agonizing.

I let my eyes rove over the rest of them. I had plans. Many plans. The hours fled quickly with my thinking. My secretary brought me some papers to sign as the others said their goodnights and left for the day.

"You looked worried, Miss Ellsworth."

"I . . I'm sorry, Mr. Julius. It's my fiance. He's on a selling trip. . . . I haven't heard from him in two weeks. . . ."

Her fiance was, at that very moment, hurrying home. His trip had been a very successful one; provided him with the money they'd needed to get married upon and set up a home.

A quick, last look to make sure we were the only ones in the office, and then I let my form dissolve . . . change. . . .

The doctor, who came up in response to my telephone call, shook his head sadly.

"She'll pull through this, Mr. Julius, but her heart—*bad!*"

"Liable to go any time, eh?"

"Yes. Too bad—she's so young . . . and good looking . . ."

All very amusing. On learning the new condition of her heart she would feel it unfair to get married. Her fiance—impetuous, young—would insist. There would be strain between them. A strain that would lead to wounds that would not heal. What made it all the better was that their love was a genuine one. Their lives would be irretrievably shattered . . . their unhappiness complete.

Once again I was alone. I locked the office and, on a sudden whim, waited for the elevator. It was a rewarding experience because it was quite full. I stepped back, saying I would wait for the next trip.

It goes without saying that there was no next trip. An instantaneous change into demonic form . . . the elevator cables shrivelling between my flaming fingers . . the loaded car plunging wildly down the shaft . . . a pretty picture.

I laughed all the way home!

MY WIFE was very careful to convince me of her love, that night. Her puerile mind had decided, during the day, that I was to be done away with. An overdose of sleeping tablets was what this futile female had decreed for me. My death would be ascribed to my getting out of a sick bed too soon.

Dinner over, we retired to the living room and pretended to read. She was going over, mentally, the method she would use to convince me to take the drugged drink she'd prepared. I made it easy for her.

"Tomorrow's going to be a tough day at the office, honey. Sure wish I had something that would help me get a good night's rest."

She got up so fast that her chair went over. Her words came tumbling out. "Why, darling, I have just the thing for you. I bought some nice wine today. I'll get it at once—"

She was so obvious about it all that I almost felt sorry for her. As she poured the wine before me, she spilled a few scarlet drops in her nervous haste.

"Here . . . it will make you feel much, much better."

I took a sip and nearly gagged. The fool must have dissolved an entire box of the sleeping tablets in the wine. The taste couldn't have fooled an idiot.

"What . . what's the matter, dear?"

"Nothing," I replied, "it's fine." I downed it all in a gulp. "How about another?"

Her good fortune almost demoralized her. The frantic speed with which she refilled my glass was pitiful. I tossed this one down as fast as the other.

Then I went into my act. I had, of necessity, to pass out for a while because the body I was using was human. She must have used the time making up her mind what speech she was going to give the doctor she would summon. Also, the histrionics she would deliver with wifely tears.

As my eyes opened she was about to lift the phone off its cradle.

I willed her to look at me.

Her mouth opened. Closed. No sound came forth. Her eyes widened . . became glazed. She wasn't pretty to look at—and, for that matter, neither was I!

I let the flesh slough from my frame in chunks. I let my skeletal remains crumble to the floor in a disordered heap.

A long, low moan was coming from deep within her. Her fingers kept plucking at her face.

I reassembled my body, except for my head. That, I kept in my lap as I sat down

Select Your Very Own Simulated Birthstone
January - Garnet
February - Amethyst
March - Aquamarine
April - White Sapphire
May - Green Spinel
June - Alexandrite
July - Ruby
August - Peridot
September - Sapphire
October - Rosicrean
November - Gold's Sapphire
December - Zircon

24k. GOLD PLATED BIRTHSTONE RING
Sweetheart Design! BEAUTIFUL Heart SHAPED STONE 98¢ Plus Tax
LADIES! Wear this lovely ring set with your very own Simulated Birthstone. Genuine 24k. Gold Plated Shank in smart, new, beautiful design is adjustable — will fit any size finger. Satisfaction guaranteed or money back. Act Now! War conditions may make it impossible to duplicate this sensational offer for years to come.
SEND NO MONEY!
Just name and month you were born. Pay postman only 98c plus Tax and postage for 1 ring or $1.09 plus Tax for 2 rings.
ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART
500 NORTH DEARBORN STREET
DEPT. 85 CHICAGO 10, ILL.

POEMS WANTED
★ FOR MUSICAL SETTING ★
Send one or more of your best song poems for immediate examination by famous band leader with N. Y. AND HOLLYWOOD CONNECTIONS. FREE Rhyming Dictionary
GREEN MUSIC SERVICE
Dept. B 445 Loeb Arcade, Minneapolis 2, Minn.

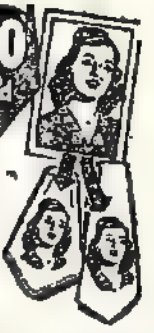
ANY BOOK IN PRINT!

Delivered at your door. We pay postage. Standard authors, new books, popular editions, fiction, reference, medical, mechanical, children's books, etc.—all at guaranteed savings. Send card now for Clarkson's 1946 Catalog.
FREE Write for our great illustrated book catalog. A short course in literature. The buying guide of 300,000 book lovers. FREE if you write NOW—TODAY!
CLARKSON PUBLISHING COMPANY
Dept. NW-5, 1253 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago 5, Ill.

150 DIAGRAM BOOK FREE
For Examining My New 7 Volume Set on
ELECTRICITY
HERE'S a valuable book of 150 Electrical and Radio wiring diagrams with charts and instructions. Practical information you need to win security and promotion. It's yours FREE merely for examining my 7-Volume Set on Applied Practical Electricity on 7-day's free trial. This 7-Volume Set COVERS EVERYTHING ELECTRICAL from HOUSE WIRING to ADVANCED AC-DC MOTORS and EQUIPMENT. Thousands of diagrams and photos . . . written so both "beginners" and "old-timers" can easily understand.
7-DAY'S FREE TRIAL I want to send you the 7-volume set AT MY RISK, postpaid, for 7-day's FREE examination. I'll also send you the FREE book of 150 Shop Prints which you are to keep as my gift regardless of whether or not you return the 7-book set. (No salesman will call.)
Send No Money!
Offer Limited—Send Coupon Now!

FREE COUPON! NOT AN ORDER—JUST A REQUEST TO SEE BOOKS
H. C. Lewis, Pres., Coyne Electrical School, Dept. 95-K3, 500 S. PAULINA STREET, CHICAGO 12, ILLINOIS
Send me the new 7 volume set "Practical Electricity." Also send the book of 150 Shop Prints which is a FREE gift to me regardless of whether or not I keep the 7 volume set. I'll either return the 7-book set in 7 days and keep the 150 Shop Prints book as a gift from you and owe you nothing or pay $5 within 7 days and $3 a month until $21 is paid, or I'll send the cash price of $19.75. One year FREE Consultation Service and Technical Bulletins included.
NAME _____ Age _____
ADDRESS _____
TOWN _____ Zone _____ STATE _____
☐ Check here if you want to save $1.25 by paying the postman the cash price of $19.75 on delivery. Same 7-day's examination and Money-Back Guarantee.

PRINT ANY PHOTO
on Paper, Cloth, Leather or Wood



SIMPLE, EASY TO USE

Magic liquid takes only 2 minutes to reproduce any snapshot you have on to stationery, handkerchiefs, ties, scarfs, etc. Won't wash off. Won't hurt negative or fabric it's used on. Personalize your belongings! An ideal gift. Complete outfit with full colors included, enough for 100 photos—only $1.00 postpaid. Sent C.O.D. for $1.21.

CHRISTY PHOTO SUPPLY
Dept. 1112 2835 N. Central, Chicago

INVENTORS

INDUSTRY NEEDS YOUR IDEAS NOW!

Two Reasons: 1. Manufacturers are getting ready NOW for postwar sales and production. 2. Right now, manufacturers are seeking products their expanded facilities can handle, factories must have products to take up the slack after war orders stop. Your chance comes with patent protection now—delay may endanger your chance. Get our NEW FREE Inventor's Book today and valuable "Invention Record" form. This request does not obligate you. Act now. Write today.

McMORROW & BERMAN
Patent Attorneys
[illegible] Atlantic Building Washington 4, D. C.

MAGIC & CARD TRICKS

How to Perform for Fun and Money

Mystifying stunts made easy. Secrets of magic revealed in new illustrated course. Teaches you tricks with coins, handkerchiefs, balls, robes, etc. Shows you how to protect yourself from card sharks . . . their card manipulations exposed! Get the "inside" information on building stage performances. Learn how to be a magician and entertain friends. Low price. Money-back guarantee. Write today for FREE details and big Success-Catalog. Norton, NELSON CO., [illegible] Dept. [illegible], Chicago 4

Write for big FREE catalog

SONGWRITERS

We are interested in all types of song poems and lyrics. Send in yours for FREE examination. If accepted, professional songwriter will collaborate with you. Fifteen years' experience. Write to:

PARAMOUNT SONG-RECORDING STUDIO,
N-6, Box 190, Hollywood, Calif.

BLACKHEADS

MUST GO . . . OR YOUR MONEY BACK

Send for a Jar of Charl's Texture Cream, used successfully for the treatment of Blackheads. If after 2 treatments your skin is not free of Blackheads we will refund your money immediately. Lubricates and cleanses the skin with utmost efficiency. Price $1.20 including Tax and Postage. C. O. D.'s accepted.

CHARL'S COSMETIC CO.
545 Fifth Ave. (Dept. L-9) New York 17, N. Y.

Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home

MEN AND WOMEN, 18 TO 50—Many Swedish Massage graduates make $50, $75 or even more per week. Large full time incomes from doctors, hospitals, sanatoriums, clubs or private practice. Others make good money in spare time. You can win independence and prepare for future security by training at home and qualifying for Diploma. Anatomy Charts and 32-page Illustrated Book FREE. Now, THE College of Swedish Massage, Dept. 512-B, [illegible] Chicago 11, Ill.

in my chair. One of its eyes winked lewdly at her.

Her eyes rolled crazily in her head until only the whites showed. Her body hit the floor with a sodden plop.

I disposed of the drugged wine, replaced my head upon my shoulders and called for help from a nearby hospital.

It took four strong internes to carry her off. They finally had to use a strait-jacket. Believe me when I tell you that she will continue screaming until the moment she dies. A very unpleasant woman . . . a very unpleasant fate. . . *Sic.*

I slept well.

THE morning gave promise of a successful day. Breakfasting in the corner drugstore gave me a chance to get in some small touches. I did something to the brain of the clerk behind the drug dispensing counter. The prescriptions he would mix that day would serve purposes that would raise me even higher in the estimations of the Great Prince.

I tipped the counter girl well and left. It was a beautiful day and my spirits were high. I was crossing the street when it happened.

The traffic lights were changing and shooting out of a side street came a car determined to beat the signal. A taxi on the avenue had already leaped forward. Both drivers swung their wheels hard in an effort to avoid each other, but it was too late.

The wheels slewed and the metal bodies came together with a grinding crash, then bounced apart. It all happened too fast for me to do anything. The crazily careening taxi slammed into my human body and darkness descended upon me.

I was dreaming . something was happening . . . I was carried . . . I tried to talk. . . . I couldn't . . . dreaming . . . there were long corridors . . . they were doing things to me . . . warning . . . something warning . . . couldn't stop them . . tried . . . couldn't dreaming . . . warning terrible tried . . . tried enormous yellow eyes . pitying . . . worried . . . pitying . . . worried . . . frightened. . . .

"There, old man, don't toss yourself around so. It's rest you need."

My eyes opened. Looked wildly around.

"Take it easy now," the voice continued, "you're in a hospital . . . but you're going to be all right. You'll be up and around before too long."

I tried to keep my voice calm. I kept it weak . . . deliberately. My human body had had its shock and now, on awakening, my immortality had made me as good as new. That was something, though, which I could not let them suspect. So, weakly: "How . . . how long have I been here, Doctor?"

"You were brought in unconscious twelve hours ago. Pretty badly bunged up, too, but that's been all patched up. Matter of rest, now . . steady recovery."

Gruelling to keep up the pretense of acting in a normal manner when there were so many questions to ask. It was better to go slowly . slowly . . .

"Thanks for everything, Doctor; I owe you my life."

"Nonsense, old man. We did our best—and luckily it was good enough."

"Did . . did I lose much blood?"

He patted my shoulder. "Don't you think you ought to save your questions until you're a bit stronger?"

STRONGER! It was all I could do not to tear his throat out as he evaded my question!

"Please, Doctor. I'm anxious to know just what happened. Do me the favor."

"All right. Then you'll go to sleep. Promise?"

"I promise." Talk. *Talk!*

"You lost quite a bit of blood . . but luckily our blood bank was able to replace that."

"What!"

"Of course. That's what saved your life."

I knew.

I was on him with a bound. He had time for just one feeble squeal before I shredded him into red ruin. The anger that filled me was not to be measured. I was blind to everything but sheer destruction.

Feet coming down the corridor warned me. I changed my shape, melted through the closed window, and took myself off to that nether bourne where the Great Prince awaited me.

His glowing eyes were sad.

I dropped to my knees before him as he

Insure Your Children

NOW! Costs so very little!

If you have children, or grandchildren, in your family, now is the time to protect each one of them with an individual Paymaster (Budget Plan) Life Insurance Policy! In addition to regular benefits for Loss of Life, this remarkable Insurance also provides Double Indemnity, Total Disability, Cash Surrender Value, Extended Insurance and other liberal Benefits.

You choose the price of Policy and size of Benefits. Pay only *5c* a week for single Benefits —10c for double Benefits—15c for triple, and so on. No Medical Examination—no collectors. SEND NO MONEY. Write for details TODAY!

PIONEER LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
1911 Insurance Exch. Bldg. ○ Rockford, Ill.

SONGWRITERS

SONGS PUBLISHED MONTHLY. ADVANCE ROYALTY. Send your songs or poems today for our exciting offer. FREE book on song writing to subscribers. Don't miss this opportunity.

HOLLYWOOD TUNESMITHS 1650 NO. LA BREA, DEPT. L-3 HOLLYWOOD 28, CALIFORNIA

High School Course at Home — Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H-838, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

REFRIGERATION and AIR CONDITIONING

REFRIGERATION TRAINED Since 1927

MECHANICAL units everywhere need servicing. Soon now units will require installation service. You can be ready with reliable pay-knowledge of this big income field. Unique home study-plus actual practice plan prepares you to enter servicing or installing field or get into business of your own. Great opportunities now and later. Get facts FREE. Write today!

UTILITIES ENGINEERING INSTITUTE
Dept. E-5, 7314 W. Belden Av., Chicago 14, Ill.

MEN

This Horseshoe Ring, Handmade, Hand-engraved, inlaid with simulated pearl, is a KNOCKOUT! Shoe and shank of everlasting Monel Metal is

GUARANTEED 20 YEARS

Supply is limited . . act now SEND NO MONEY with order, just name and ring size. Pay on arrival, tax included, ONLY $3.98, NOT one cent extra for anything! Return in five days for refund if not delighted. Address:

NATIONAL JEWELRY CO.
Dept. 412-H Wheeling, W. Va.

BUY FROM THE OLDEST ESTABLISHED FIRM IN THE UNITED STATES SELLING EYE GLASSES BY MAIL

GLASSES as LOW as $1.95 PAIR

6 DAYS TRIAL

Choice of the LATEST STYLES—remarkably LOW PRICES. SATISFACTION GUARANTEED or your money back. If you are not satisfied—they will not cost you a cent.

SEND NO MONEY Write for FREE catalog today showing all of our many styles and LOW PRICES

BROKEN GLASSES REPAIRED AT LOW COST

ADVANCE SPECTACLE CO. Dept. HH-11 Chicago, Ill.

POEMS WANTED

For Musical Setting

Mother, Home, Love, Sacred, Patriotic, Comic or any subject. Don't Delay—Send us your Original Poem at once—for immediate examination and FREE Rhyming Dictionary.

RICHARD BROTHERS 27 WOODS BUILDING CHICAGO, ILL.

I WAS AN ALCOHOLIC

I know the misery from the curse of drink; the agony to loved ones, the loss of happiness, money, health, job. . . BUT I know how to break the spell of whiskey. Write today . . . tell me your problem. Get the answer! NEWTON, NF12, P. O. Box 861, Hollywood, California.

ITCH!

Checked in a JIFFY

Relieve itching caused by eczema, athlete's foot, scabbies, pimples and other itching conditions. Use soothing, medicated D. D. D. Prescription. Greaseless, stainless. Soothes, comforts and checks itching fast. 35c trial bottle proves it—or money back. Don't suffer. Ask your druggist today for D. D. D. Prescription.

shook his head. "I am sorry, loyal one . . . sorry.

"But it wasn't my fault."

"I know. I know. It is the order of things. It cannot be changed—even by me."

"That blood ."

"Yes, loyal one. It means you cannot come back again. You must go back to the Earth."

"For . . for how long, Great Prince?"

"For all time!"

"Never to come back . . . *never?*"

His eyes were sorrowful. "You will return to Earth, loyal one. You will remain there—forever. You are immortal. You can still serve me faithfully . but you cannot return. It is the law. Immutable."

"Tell me, Great Prince. Will I still retain the powers and the talents you have given me?"

"Yes. That is what I meant when I told you that you could still continue to serve me."

"One last favor, Great Prince."

"Ask it."

"The power to enter the body of those who are well. Not to take the place of a departing soul, but to be able to enter the human form of any one to control them from within . . to force them to my will . . to have this complete power throughout all Eternity."

"Granted. That is within the Rules."

I TOOK one long, last look around and then I left. I have been back on Earth now for about a month. I have not been idle. Do you wonder why I have told you all this? Do you wonder that I have taken the time and trouble to outline my career? But surely you must have suspected. You are no fool.

Remember that I am immortal.

Does that mean anything to you?

Think.

Think of the hundred . . thousand . . ten thousand . . hundred thousand . . . million thousand million . . billion . . trillion years I have in which to serve the Great Prince.

Think of your Earth. Think of the people that crawl upon its surface. Now narrow it down. Narrow it to your own hemisphere . . . to your own country . . . to your

own state . . to your own city, town or village to your own house . . .

To yourself.

Let us be sensible about it. There is absolutely no way out for you. Of course you can argue that, with the population of your Earth consisting of numberless millions, it is possible for me to miss up on you during your lifetime.

That is not logic. It is specious reasoning.

I admit that you have as good a chance as any one in dying before I get to you. *But —haven't you noted how I have harped upon my immortality?*

If you will forgive my feeble humor, remember that I have all the time in the World.

Suppose I don't get to you . . . *personally.* You still cannot escape me. Repeating that I have enough time to get around to everyone *eventually* should stir the chords of understanding.

Get it?

Your descendants.

If not this generation, then the next. If not this century, then the next. If not this eon, then the next. It is of no importance to me whether I get to you directly or through your descendants. The important thing is that—without any possible chance of failure—I'm going to get at you *somehow.*

I can be your cab driver. I can be the policeman on the corner. I can be the barber who shaves you. I can be the person who gives you your next job.

I can be the next person to ring your door-bell . . .

★ ★ ★ ★

Buy Victory Bonds . . .

For Postwar Prosperity

★ ★ ★ ★

LEARN AT HOME TO MOUNT BIRDS

Animals, Heads, Fishes, Pets; to TAN. Be a Taxidermist. Profit and FUN.

Hunters, save your valuable TROPHIES. Mount ducks, squirrels, everything. Learn to TAN for leather and fun. Wonderful HOBBY Have a HOME MUSEUM. BIG PROFITS mounting for others. INVESTIGATE NOW.

FREE BOOK With 100 fine game pictures. NOW absolutely FREE. Write TODAY.

Send Postal TODAY for FREE BOOK. State AGE.

N. W. SCHOOL OF TAXIDERMY, Dept. 3039, Omaha, Neb.

SONGWRITERS

Place your songs with us. Melodies supplied WITHOUT CHARGE by well known Hollywood composers. We record your song and make it presentable to the publishers. Lead sheets and records furnished. Send your song material for free examination. Write for details.

CINEMA SONG CO.

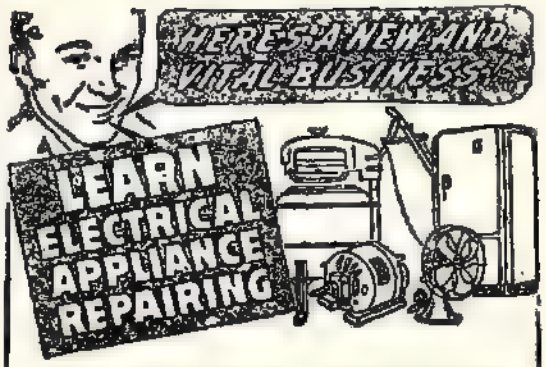
P. O. Box 670 Dept. H-7 Beverly Hills, Calif.

LEG SORES

"NURSE DENCKER'S HOME TREATMENT"

This ointment affords soothing and palliative relief for leg sores and other surface lesions. It does not interfere with daily work. Thousands of users enthusiastically report favorable results from "Nurse Dencker's Home Treatment." Write for Free Trial and reports of results from enthusiastic users. Send today. Dencker Products, Dept. 399-C, Long Beach 1, Calif.

FREE TRIAL


HERE'S A NEW AND VITAL BUSINESS
LEARN ELECTRICAL APPLIANCE REPAIRING

Offers Big Money—Independence

If you are mechanically inclined—can hold and use tools it will pay you to learn electrical appliance repairing. Operate from your garage, basement, etc. Work as many hours as you wish—the appliance repairman is his own boss. On many types of repairs it is usual for a repairman to charge on the basis of $5.00 to $8.00 an hour!

No Previous Experience Needed

Profusely illustrated our new course shows you in simple, easy to understand language plus drawings and photographs, how to make each repair on refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, motors, fans, irons, etc., etc. Explains and gives you a working knowledge of electricity, welding, nickel plating, etc. Shows you how to build the power tools you need and how to solicit and keep business coming to you. Not a theory course but an honest to goodness practical course written by and used by repairmen the country over. Price of course is so low that the savings on your own household appliances will pay for it. Act NOW! Send today for FREE literature. Christy Supply Co., 2835 N. Central Ave., Dept. D-412, Chicago 34, Illinois.

ARREST HIM, OFFICER!
I'LL HAVE COMPLETE FACTS ON THE OTHER FELLOW TONIGHT!

Secret Service Operator No. 38 is on the job . . . FOLLOW HIM through all the excitement of his chase after the counterfeit gang. Write NOW for

FREE Confidential Reports

Mr. 38 Made to His Chief!

It may open your eyes to the great opportunity for YOU as a well paid Finger Print Expert. The kind of work you'd like. Excitement! Travel! Thrills! A REGULAR MONTHLY salary. REWARD MONEY. 33⅓% of all Identification Bureaus in U.S. employ I.A.I. students or graduates! Write for Free Reports, Finger Print Book, low prices. Easy Terms Offer.

Literature will be sent only to persons stating their age.

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 1549-B, Chicago 40, Illinois

POEMS WANTED

To be set to music. Send your song poem today for free examination by our staff headed by nationally famous hit composer of "DREAM A LITTLE DREAM OF ME." Our new 3 step plan is most liberal and complete ever offered. Write today for free booklet.

SCREENLAND RECORDERS
Dept. N Hollywood 38, California

10K GOLD RINGS
GENUINE DIAMONDS

These Rings contain Genuine Diamonds, mounted in solid 10K yellow Gold. We offer a 10-day trial—satisfaction or your Money Back! For a limited time only—$5.49 each or the "Bridal Pair" Only $9.95 plus tax. Send No Money—when your Rings arrive, pay Postman. Act Now! Genuine Diamonds, solid Gold rings. Gift box free.

VICTORY DIAMOND CO.
Dept. NF-10 Wheeling, W. Va.

MAGAZINES (BACK-DATED) **5¢ AND UP**

Magazines of all publishers. Bargain prices. Western—Romantic—Movie—Detective—Sports—Comics—Aviation—Radio—Photography—Physical Culture—Snappy—Art—Foreign—Technical—etc. Also books, booklets, subscriptions, pin-up photos, etc. Before ordering send 10¢ for catalogue to cover mailing charges. Dime refund on first order.

CICERONE'S MAGAZINE CENTER
863 First Avenue Dept. 10 New York 17 N. Y.

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have. Make yourself free and happy with Tobacco Redeemer. Write for free booklet telling of baneful effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men.

30 Years in Business

FREE BOOK

THE NEWELL COMPANY
400 Clayton Sta., St. Louis, Mo.

LAW STUDY AT HOME for Personal Success and Larger Earnings. 38 years expert instruction—over 108,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All text material furnished. Easy payment plan. Send for FREE BOOK—"Law and Executive Guidance." NOW!

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 53-M, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

Collectors' Items

HERE is an interesting point made by Jack Snow whose yarn, "Seed," appears in this issue of WEIRD TALES.

The Bible of all alert book dealers in the United States, Great Britain and many other lands, *Publishers' Weekly*, features a section wherein book dealers may advertise for rare and out-of-print books wanted by their customers. Each week thousands of dealers scan these listings. Noting books they have in stock, they describe and quote them via penny postcards to the seeking dealers.

The above is a preamble to an incident which will delight H. P. Lovecraft's many readers and admirers. For in the July 7, 1945, issue of *Publishers' Weekly* a New York book dealer listed among books he is searching for "The Necronomicon" and Ludvig Prinn's "Mysteries of the Worm"—mythical volumes invented by Lovecraft and mentioned in a number of his most popular stories. Certainly these are the two rarest of all out-of-print books—for they have never been in print! August Derleth, Robert Bloch and Henry Kuttner will particularly enjoy this since they have carried on the Lovecraft mythos by mentioning these legendary volumes in their stories in WEIRD TALES.

I am sure this tribute to Lovecraft will be of much more interest to WEIRD TALES readers than anything I could write concerning myself or my own story in this issue—so I will just say about "Seed"—that it is my canary's favorite food! *Jack Snow*

Thanks, Jack. And by the way, in answer to numerous readers' inquiries, we are pleased to pass along the information to all Oz fans

among WEIRD TALES customers that the new Oz book—"The Magical Mimics in Oz"—by Jack Snow, and based on the famous Oz books by L. Frank Baum, will be published early this spring.

Transference of Sin

MANLY WADE WELLMAN, who combines a broad and intensive knowledge of matters weird with the born story-teller's ability to make those matters highly entertaining, has some thoughts for us apropos of his good yarn, "Sin's Doorway," in this issue of WEIRD TALES.

Confides Wellman:

Whatever the merits or successes of the custom of sin-eating at a funeral, it was once widely practised and still hangs on here and there. I gather that it is Anglo-Saxon usage, but the belief in transference of sin is universal—*vide* the Scapegoat ceremony described in Holy Writ. Similar rites are noticed in *The Golden Bough* as occurring in every part of the world.

As to gardinels, I have but one informant about such things. He's convinced that they exist, and plenty of them, and he has slowed me up considerably in any impulse I may feel to enter strange empty houses.

Things like these are apter to bob up in the American South than anywhere else. It's a witch-ridden and devil-haunted place, and many a tale not told by Uncle Remus is offered you there for the truth. And it's easy to disbelieve such things when you're a newcomer and know no better. When you've been there a little while, you may have certain facts proven to you, and it's seldom a pleasant proof. I, for one, wouldn't take the responsibility for more sin than my own soul carries, not for all the dollars in Dixie.

Manly Wade Wellman

READERS' VOTE

KURBAN	SATAN'S PHONOGRAPH
CHARIOTS OF SAN FERNANDO	PIKEMAN
SIN'S DOORWAY	THE DIVERSIONS OF MME. GAMORRA
SEED	ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD
MR. BAUER AND THE ATOMS	

Here's a list of nine stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and send it to us.

WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza New York City 20, N. Y.

LOOSE DENTAL PLATES
RELINED AND TIGHTENED AT HOME $1

NEWLY IMPROVED DENDEX RELINER, a plastic, builds up (refits) loose upper and lower dentures. Really makes them fit as they should without using powder. Easily applied. No heating required. Brush it on and wear your plates while it sets. It adheres to the plates only and makes a comfortable, smooth and durable surface that can be washed and scrubbed. Lasts for months. Not a powder or wax. Contains no rubber or gum. Neutral pink color. Sold on MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE. Not sold in stores. Mail $1 for generous supply, brush and directions and we pay postage. *New Postage Rates*—C.O.D. orders $1.34.
DENDEX CO., 2714 S. Hill St., Dept. 72-G, Los Angeles 7, Cal.

do you WORRY?

Why worry and suffer any longer if we can help you? Try a Brooks Patented Air Cushion. This marvelous appliance for most forms of reducible rupture is GUARANTEED to bring YOU heavenly comfort and security—day and night—at work and play—or it costs you NOTHING. Thousands happy. Light, neat-fitting. No hard pads or springs. For men, women, and children. Durable, cheap. Sent on trial to prove it. Not sold in stores. Beware of imitations. Write for Free Book on Rupture, no-risk trial order plan, and proof of results. All Correspondence Confidential.
Brooks Company, 351 State St., Marshall, Mich.

WRITE SONGS

The writer of "BOOTS AND SADDLES" and other song hits will compose the melody for your song poem. Never has such an opportunity been offered new writers. Send your song poems and lyrics for *FREE* examination. Write for details and FREE INSTRUCTIVE BOOKLET.
HOLLYWOOD HARMONY HOUSE
1586 North La Brea STUDIO 8-9 Los Angeles 28, Calif.

DON'T GET UP NIGHTS

If you get up many times at night due to Irritation of Bladder or Urinary Tract, try PALMO TABLETS at our risk if you have never used them. We will send you a full-size package from which you are to use 20 Tablets FREE. If not delighted at the palliative relief you enjoy, return the package and you owe us nothing. Send No Money. Write today and we will send your Palmo Tablets by return mail.
H. D. POWER CO., Dept. 107-A, 120 Greenwood Ave., Battle Creek, Mich.

Free for Asthma

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma so terrible you choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is impossible because of the struggle to breathe, if you feel the disease is slowly wearing your life away, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Co. for a free trial of a remarkable method. No matter where you live or whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. If you have suffered a lifetime and tried everything you could learn of without relief; even if you are utterly discouraged, do not abandon hope but send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Address
FRONTIER ASTHMA CO.,
252-S Frontier Bldg., 462 Niagara St., Buffalo 1, N. Y.

DON'T LOSE AT DICE!
NOW EXPERTS TAKE YOUR MONEY
Write for free literature and details on sensational new book which reveals the methods, techniques and betting systems professionals use to take your money. It costs nothing to get free literature. Write for it. Mailed promptly in plain envelope. Also magic dice and cards. Write
R. Wayne Book Co., Dept. A6, 717 W. Grove, Pontiac, Ill.

LEARN TO PLAY THE **HAWAIIAN GUITAR**

The Hawaiian way. Surprise and entertain your friends. Our simple method makes learning to play music as fascinating as a game. Shows you in pictures how to do it. Previous musical training unnecessary. Earn while learning to new plan. You pay for lessons as they are received. Write today for free information. A postcard will do. (Fine guitars supplied $7.50 and up.)
25c PER LESSON
HAWAIIAN GUITAR INSTRUCTION
P. O. Box 185, Dept. K-48, Maywood, Ill.

LINCOLN AND INDIAN HEAD
PENNIES WANTED
WILL PAY **$10.00 EACH** FOR CERTAIN LINCOLN PENNIES!
Indian Head Cents $50.00; Nickels $500.00; Dimes $1,000.00. All rare coins, bills, stamps wanted! Send 10c for Illustrated Catalogue showing coins wanted.
FEDERAL COIN EXCHANGE, 11-NF, Columbus 5, Ohio.

WEIRD BOOKS RENTED
Books by Lovecraft, Merritt, Quinn, etc., rented by mail. 3c a day plus postage. Write for free list. WEREWOLF LENDING LIBRARY, 7200 Transit Blvd., Pittsburgh, Pa.

FOR VICTORY
Buy a share in America
Invest in your country and help win the peace.
Get the Victory Habit — buy Victory Bonds and Stamps every pay day.
United States VICTORY BONDS AND STAMPS

9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Write to MARTIN WARE, SECRETARY

• This is your club—a medium to help you and other fantasy and science-fiction fans get together. Readers wanted it—they wrote in telling us how much they would enjoy meeting others of similar tastes.

• Membership is very simple: just drop us a line, so that we can enroll you on the club roster, and publish your name and address in the magazine.

• A membership card carrying the above design —personal token of your fellowship with the weird and the fantastic—will be sent on request. (A stamped, addressed envelope should be enclosed.)

NEW MEMBERS

Henrietta Bruce, Box 141, Homerville, Georgia
Kathleen Anderson, 77 Park Street, Gloversville, New York
Eleanor Nenis, Box 11, Fort Mill, South Carolina
Carroll Case, Jr., 678 Harris St., Concord, North Carolina
Albert Large, 1001½ West Douglas, Wichita 12, Kansas
Louis Chernoff, 1068 East 13th St., Brooklyn 29, New York
Ronald F. Pakan, 3249 N. Karlov Ave., Chicago 41, Illinois
John M. Curry, 10 Perth Avenue, New Rochelle, New York
Rita Schweitzer, 669 East 5th St., Brooklyn 18, New York
Joe Ernst, 3516 Indiana, St. Louis, Missouri
Jack W. Finn, 178 Decker Place, Woodbridge, New Jersey
Jack Bannoli, 404 Ogden Ave., Jersey City 7, New Jersey
Eileen Kearney, 1318 R. I. Ave., N. W. Washington 5, D. C.
James Yates, Greenview, West Virginia
Robert Freeman, 120 Rand Avenue, Lexington 2, Kentucky
Audrey Shippee, 67 Grange Avenue, Red Bank, New Jersey
Robert Boyer, 243 Rowe Street, Tamaqua, Pennsylvania
Jean Gerretsen, 141-12 123 Ave., S. Ozone Park 20, N. Y.
Robert Harlick, 831 86th Ave., San Francisco 21, California
L. D. Stevens, 146-14 46th Ave., Flushing, L. I., New York
Peter Data, 312 East 8th Street, New York 9, New York
Dick S. Helmer, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Bob Tillotson, c/o The Evans Hotel, Hot Springs, So. Dak.
Wesley Jorgensen, 3627 Baring St., Philadelphia, Penn.
Glenda Merrick, Box 475, St. Anthony, Idaho
Noel Baker Box 35, Wequetonsing, Michigan
Shicla Adams, 232 East Nittany Ave., State College, Penn.
Mrs. Anne Ferro, 3449 North Elaine Pl., Chicago 13, Illinois
Gilbert Cochrun, Lock Box 335, Claremore, Oklahoma
Hilde Walker, 54 Crescent Street, Yaphank, New York
Mary B. Koledi, 29 Pitt Street, New York, New York
Arline M. Harlow, 175 Naples Rd., Brookline, Massachusetts
Harry E. Adams, PhM 3/c, Box 15, N. A. A. S., Cecil Field, Jacksonville, Florida
Pvt. Robert P. Pavlak, 16157865, Sec. 4, Co. C, 1552 S. U.; A. S. T., Ohio State University, Columbus 10, Ohio
E. Lester Johnson, 420 West 66th St., Chicago 21, Illinois
Mrs. Sophie Madalean Binkowski, 511 North Jester Avenue, Dallas 11, Texas
Miss Charlotte Shucard, 1559 East 7th St., Brooklyn 30, New York
Miss Beverly Dutchkin, 1681 East 9th Street, Brooklyn 30, New York
Thomas R. Cake, 1414 Monterey Ave., Norfolk 8, Virginia
Joseph W. Schenck, 2261 Benefit Street, New Orleans 17, Louisiana
Mrs. Marion E. Hanglin, 5 Maple St., Brookline, Mass.

Joseph E. Hanglin, 5 Maple St., Brookline, Massachusetts
Stanley R. Gan, Room 421, The Temperance Hotel, Ningara Falls, New York
Ben Maya, 1615 East 7th Street, Brooklyn, New York
Melvin Siefberg, 1560 East 7th St., Brooklyn 30, New York
Leonard J. Grossman, 580 West End Ave., New York 24, New York
John E. Chaney, 954 Forrest St., Baltimore 2, Maryland
Harry Rabin, Port Barre, Louisiana
Ludwig J. Beck, Box 135, Bartley, Nebraska
Irwin Pollack, 82 East 96th Street, Brooklyn, New York
Pvt. John Terlesky, H. & S. Btry, 4th Bn. 12th Mov., 3rd Mov. Div. F. M. F., c/o P. P. O., San Francisco, Calif.
Jerry Winters, c/o Hunt Bros. Circus, R. F. D. No. 1, Bordentown, New Jersey
Benjamin F. Esly, Jr., 2691 East Oliver St., Baltimore 13, Maryland.
Edward Ralle Fitzgerald, Lansing, Kans.
Rose Marie Riewald, 345 West 4th St., New York 14, N. Y.
Freddy A. Ranchfletser, 526 East 110th St., N. E., Cleveland 8, Ohio
Lois Wells, Lennoxville, Que., Can.
John E. Collins, 155 E. Madison St., Easton, Pa.
J. J. Kramer, 3701 Agatite, Chicago 25, Ill.
Raymond Anderson, 70-36 65th Pl., Brooklyn 27, N. Y.
B. M. Dorset, R.F.D. No. 1, Falls Church, Va.
Frederick F. Ladd, Jr., 389 Main St., Amesbury, Mass.
Frank Coppadona, 24-04 23rd St., Long Island City 2, N. Y.
Dorothy Boose, 29 Buelah Ave., Hamilton, Ont., Can.
L. T. Parker, 522 Avenue K., Dallas 16, Tex.
Palmer Tidmore, 903 Graymont Ave., West, Birmingham, Ala.
Jean Wells, 121 East Third St., Lafayette, La.

We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of WEIRD TALES, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1945, State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared William J. Delaney, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the President-Treasurer of SHORT STORIES, INC., Publishers of WEIRD TALES, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: *Publisher*, SHORT STORIES, INC., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.; *Editor*, D. McIlwraith, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.; *Managing Editor*, None; *Business Manager*, William J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: SHORT STORIES, INC., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.; William J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for which such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

(*Signed*) WILLIAM J. DELANEY, *President*.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 26th day of September, 1945.

[SEAL] (*Signed*) HENRY J. PAUROWSKI.

Notary Public, Bronx Co. No. 23, Reg. No. 51-P-7. Cert. filed in N. Y. Co. No. 243, Reg. No. 180-P-7.

My commission expires March 30, 1947.

10K Gold Bridal Pair. 4 Genuine chip diamonds. $8.95 each—Pair $9.95.
Fiery Earrings. Simulated rhinestones.
Identification Bracelet Lady or man's. Silver Plated. Engraved front.
SEND NO MONEY. Money Back Guarantee. Pay postman C.O.D. plus postage and tax. Or, write for Big Free Catalog of Lovely Earrings, Anklets, Costume Pins, Sweetheart Lockets; Pearls, Bracelets, Billfolds, Charming Rosary, Compacts, etc. Latest styles from Broadway and Hollywood.
INTERNATIONAL DIAMOND CO.
2251 Calumet Ave. Dept. E-53 Chicago 16, Ill.

If Ruptured Try This Out

Modern Protection Provides Great Comfort and Holding Security

Without Torturous Truss Wearing

An "eye-opening" revelation in sensible and comfortable reducible rupture protection may be yours for the asking, without cost or obligation. Simply send name and address to William S. Rice, Inc., Dept. 7-W, Adams, N. Y., and full details of the new and different Rice Method will be sent you Free. Without hard flesh-gouging pads or tormenting pressure, here's a Support that has brought joy and comfort to thousands — by releasing them from Trusses with springs and straps that bind and cut. Designed to securely hold a rupture up and in where it belongs and yet give freedom of body and genuine comfort. For full information — write today!

SONG POEMS WANTED

TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Free Examination. Send Your Poems To

J. CHAS. McNEIL

A. B. MASTER OF MUSIC

810-RF So. Alexandria Los Angeles 5, Calif.

IS EPILEPSY INHERITED?

WHAT CAUSES IT?

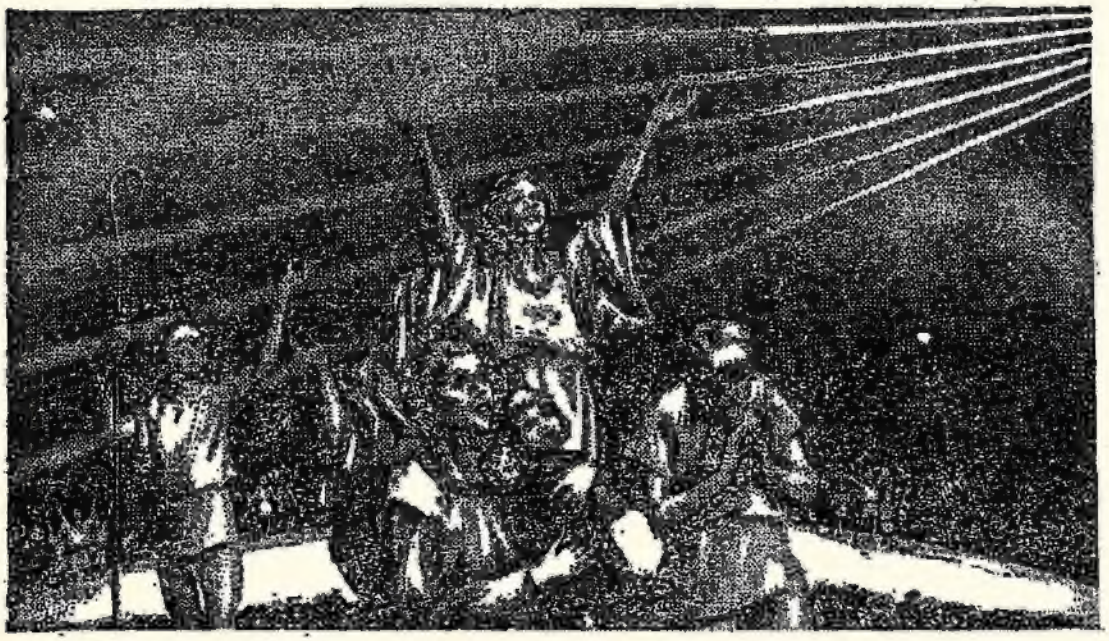
A booklet containing the opinions of famous doctors on this interesting subject will be sent FREE, while they last, to any reader writing to the Educational Division, 535 Fifth Ave., Dept. NF-12, New York, N. Y.

Complete HOME-STUDY Courses and self-instruction books, slightly used. Rented, sold, exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction guaranteed. Cash paid for used courses. Full details and 92-page illustrated bargain catalog Free. Write now.

NELSON COMPANY

321 So. Wabash Avenue, Dept. X-23, Chicago 4, Ill.

UNSUSPECTED POWER



The Mysterious Influence In The Air You Breathe!

THE SOUL OF THE UNIVERSE is in the air you breathe. Deposited in your blood—with each inhalation you take—is *the intelligence* that directs the course of the planets through the misty reaches of space, and the strange phenomenon of life itself.

What is it that causes your heart to beat, your lungs to expand and contract? What mind directs *the cells* of your being, each in their purpose—some to create bone, others tissue and hair? What *consciousness* pervades these vibratory *globules of life* and gives them awareness of their Cosmic function?

Are you one of the millions who have looked *beyond yourself* for some external Divine Power or agency? Have you searched in vain for some outer sign or word of Divine assurance when in doubt or in need? Now learn of the *unsuspected power* that exists in every simple breath—and that becomes *part of you.* The ancient Egyptians believed that the essence of life was borne on the wings of the air. The Bible proclaims that with the first breath man becomes not just an animated being—but a *"living soul." Try this experiment,* and prove a Vital Life Force exists in the air. When you are in pain or despondent take a deep breath. Hold it as long as comfortable—then notice the momentary relief.

This Amazing Free Book

Would you seriously like to know how to draw upon this Intelligence of the Cosmic, with which the air is permeated? You can use it to awaken the creative powers of your mind, and for making life an experience of *achievement.* Use the coupon below for a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." It tells how in the privacy of your home *you may learn* to use these simple, useful, *natural laws.*

USE THIS GIFT COUPON

Scribe Z. K. C. The Rosicrucians (AMORC)
Rosicrucian Park, San Jose, California

I am sincerely interested in learning how to use the mysterious influences of the universe in the betterment of my life. Please send me a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life."

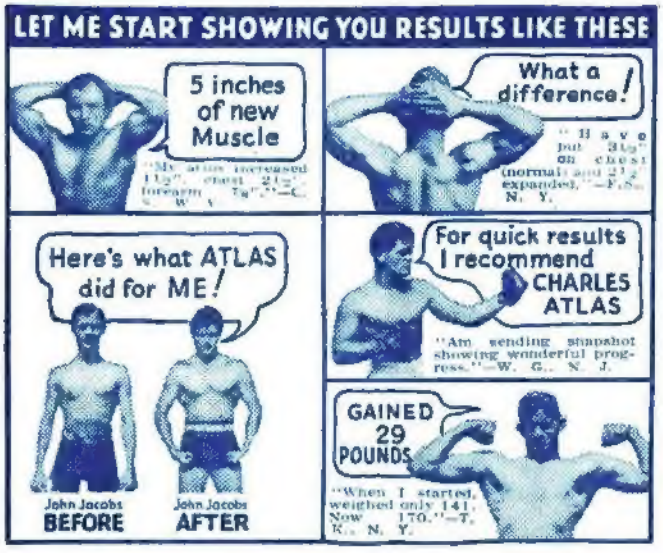
NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

Rosicrucians are NOT a religious organization

THE ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC) SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

Will You Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a *New Man?*



CHARLES ATLAS

Awarded the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" in international contest—in competition with ALL men who would consent to appear against him.

This is a recent photo of Charles Atlas. It is not a studio picture but an actual untouched snapshot.

Here's What Only 15 Minutes a Day Can Do For You

I DON'T care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a new, beautiful suit of muscle!

What's My Secret?

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. When you have learned to develop your strength through *"Dynamic Tension,"* you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real solid LIVE MUSCLE.

My method—*"Dynamic Tension"*—will turn the trick for you. No theory—every exercise is practical. And, man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of *"Dynamic Tension"* almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY.

FREE BOOK

"Everlasting Health and Strength"

In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became NEW MEN in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped THEM do. See what I can do for YOU! For a real thrill, send for this book today. AT ONCE. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9K, 115 East 23rd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9K
115 E. 23rd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of *"Dynamic Tension"* will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City ..... Zone No. (if any) ..... State .....

☐ *Check here if under 16 for Booklet A.*

PAYS accumulated **ACCIDENT BENEFITS** for Accidental Loss of Life, Limb, or Sight up to **$6000.00**

For LOSS OF TIME! Accident Disability Benefits up to $100 a month for as long as 24 months, or **$2400.00**

SICKNESS BENEFITS For Loss of Time due to Sickness, a maximum Monthly Income of . . . . . **$100.00 PER MO.**

HOSPITAL EXPENSES for Sickness or Accident, including $5.00 a day for hospital room, up to **$650.00**

DON'T TAKE CHANCES! . . . Accidents happen to 20 persons every minute of every day; and sickness strikes when least expected . . . bringing doctor bills, hospital bills, loss of income and pressing demands for cash, all at the same time. Why take chances? Why delay another single day? NOW you can enjoy the ALL AROUND insurance protection you need and should have at a price anyone can afford . . . just $1 a month.

CASH BENEFITS THAT ARE BIG ENOUGH TO BE WORTHWHILE!

This is no "penny ante" policy. It's benefits are big enough to do some good! Policy pays on ALL accidents, ALL common sicknesses, even for minor injuries; all according to liberal terms of the policy. Disability benefits start the very first day, no waiting period.

ACT TODAY! TOMORROW MAY BE TOO LATE!

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION required! No red tape! Policy issued BY MAIL at BIG SAVINGS. Ages 15 to 69. Actual Policy sent for 10 Days' FREE Examination. ACT NOW! Write for it today. No cost. No obligation. No salesman will call. Use coupon below. Do it today!

FREE 10-Day Inspection Coupon

THE SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
450-C Service Life Bldg. Omaha, Nebr.

Without cost or obligation, send your GOLD SEAL $1-A-MONTH Policy for 10 DAYS' FREE INSPECTION.

Name_____

Address_____ Age_____

City_____ State_____

Beneficiary_____